

# HUNTER

## THE RECKONING

### PLAYERS GUIDE



A Player Resource for Hunter: The Reckoning®

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### PLAYERS GUIDE

**Do Not Go Gentle . . .**

Now that your hunter knows the truth about the World of Darkness — that monsters lurk in the shadows, prey upon helpless victims and oppress humanity — he goes well armed into the night. Finally, the predator will know what it means to be prey.

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It's time to take back the night.

**HUNTER**  
THE RECKONING



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OLSON

# PROLOGUE: LONELY HOME

*Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.*

— Exodus 9:19

Kathy Niven walked through her front door just after 6:30 Tuesday morning. In her exhaustion, her left shoulder brushed hard against the doorjamb, and she wobbled to the kitchen table. Luckily, the room was empty and nobody saw her staggering like a drunk. She didn't have to skulk in under the confused and hurt scrutiny of her family. With just that much in the world going right for her, Kathy took a deep, shuddering breath and leaned weakly against the back of a chair.

As she stood propped up, she sagged and fought to keep her eyes open. The smell of coffee brewing helped. The muffled sound of water running in the upstairs shower helped, too. The steady, staccato rhythm told her that her husband or her son was awake and would soon make an appearance downstairs. Someone would come down the stairs and face her soon. When that happened, Kathy thought, she would much rather be awake and moving than slumped insensate over the table like a half-drowned castaway.

Standing up straight again, she looked up and down at her reflection in the glass door. Her ash-blond hair hung tangled and lank around her shoulders. The plastic clip she'd bound it with was

long gone. Dirt and grimy water had stained her blue jeans and denim jacket. More water squelched between her toes and made her tennis shoes squeak on the linoleum floor. The look on her face gave her the most pause, though. She saw lines reflected in the glass — beside her eyes, bracketing her mouth, creasing her forehead — that shocked her. Was this hag all that had survived last night? Fascinated and repulsed, Kathy stared at the old woman in the glass until the rising sun brightened the sky enough to take the reflection away. When the haggard crone disappeared, Kathy headed out of the kitchen with heavy steps. Her family certainly shouldn't see her this way.

Underwear, jeans, shirts and towels lay strewn around the open laundry closet in the hallway that led to the stairs. Someone had obviously been scavenging in the dryer; the machine sat half-open with a brown sock lolling out like a strangled corpse's tongue. Kathy walked right by without stopping even to close the dryer door. Her husband would expect her to take care of all this laundry while he was away at work, but she didn't have the energy to worry about it at the moment. In truth, she probably wouldn't have had the energy to get

moving again if she stopped. Her right arm was stiffening up at the shoulder where she'd almost dislocated it the night before. The amount of trust she put in her left knee diminished with every step. And her eyelids pressed shut as hard as they could. Her body wanted to wrap up tight and rest, but she wouldn't let it. She plodded farther toward the stairs and left soggy, dirty footprints on the shirts and underwear.

The steps at the end of the hall loomed up more daunting than a cliff face, and Kathy stopped. She stood there trying to decide whether to try to lift her swollen knee first or to trust it to hold her entire weight while she led with the other foot. Eventually, she compromised by leaning on the banister and hauling herself upward as quickly as she could. Every shuffling step took an eternity and pulled the grimace on her face more and more taut.

As she reached the halfway point, she had to stop. The pain flowed in like water, but she tried hard to banish all traces of it from her face. Her son came bounding along the hall at the top of the steps. He stopped momentarily, then hurried down with a smile to embrace his mother. His excited approach sent jolts through the steps and up Kathy's leg, but she bore the pain stoically. She managed to bite her tongue rather than cry out when the boy bumped her knee in his exuberance. When he finished his hug, Kathy gripped the banister in a cored, white-knuckled fist.

"Hi, Mom," he chirped. "You're home!"

"Yep," Kathy murmured in a throaty whisper. She hadn't spoken in some hours, and she feared a cold was coming on. She coughed to clear her throat, then forced herself to swallow the sticky mass that came up when she did. "Morning, kiddo."

"When'd you get home last night?" the boy said. "Did you make me breakfast? You look tired. You okay?"

Kathy raised a shaking hand and tousled the boy's short blond hair. The kid beamed like a puppy.

"Yeah, a little tired," Kathy said. "I'm going upstairs to bed."

"You're going back to bed?" the boy asked. He scrunched up his freckled nose in innocent confusion. It didn't occur to him that his mother might have slept elsewhere that night. "I wish I could go back to bed. I've got a math test today. And pictures. Picture day sucks!"

The boy stretched his neck, and Kathy realized that her son was wearing a pressed white shirt with a clip-on blue tie. His dark-blue polyester pants had been pressed neatly. He looked nice in a shrunken-yuppie sort of way.

"Language," Kathy said, not looking her son in the eye. "I've got to go back to bed. I just came down to see you before you got your picture taken at school. You look nice, sweetheart. Just like daddy."

The boy was so happy to hear his mother make the comparison that he should have had a tail to wag. He hugged her again, pulling her dangerously off balance, then ran the rest of the way down the steps. Mommy's little avalanche.

When he got to the kitchen, he stopped and said, "Hey, where's breakfast, Mom?"

Standing rigid with her eyes shut tight, Kathy didn't turn more than her head. "Make some cereal, Bradley," she said, trying not to spit the words out through clenched teeth. "Mom's got to get back to bed."

"But we're out of milk, remember?"

"Then microwave some Pop Tarts, hon," Kathy called down. "I'll get some milk later."

"What am I gonna drink with 'em?" Bradley persisted. "We're out of juice, too."

"Have some Coke then," Kathy said. "I don't care. Just don't miss your bus, okay?"

"Wow, thanks, Mom!" Bradley said.

Thrilled nearly to pieces, Bradley made himself some breakfast and finally left Kathy alone. Facing the rest of her climb with even less enthusiasm, Kathy pulled herself up the steps again. Now she had to use both hands to overcome the inertia of her rest. She could feel another mass of mucus at the back of her mouth as well, and she had to swallow once more.

When she finally reached the top of the stairs, she leaned in the direction of her bedroom and hobbled down the hall. Her knee hardly bent any more, and she cradled her right arm across her stomach. The hallway seemed to stretch for miles, dizzying Kathy for a long spell, but she made it to her room at last. Maybe God was smiling on her after all, because the shower was still running when she slipped in like a thief.

Taking off her dirty, wet clothes after so many hours made her cry. The fabric clung to her, forcing her to stretch and strain already aching joints. Pulling her stained and threadbare University of Kentucky sweatshirt over her head threatened to pop her right shoulder out of place for the second time in twelve hours. She would almost have preferred cutting off her sports bra with her pocket knife, but she managed to wriggle free of it without crying out by biting the inside of her lip. Tears rolled down her face, but her shoulder stayed in place. Her shoes and socks came off next, followed by damp jeans that clung to her for all they were worth.

Naked and in more pain than when she'd started, she wadded up her clothes with her tennis shoes and pushed them under the bed with her heel.

As she pulled on a burgundy bathrobe, the sound of the rushing water in the bathroom tapered off and pattered to silence. Her husband had finished his shower. He stayed in the bathroom a little longer to sing along with the radio, unaware that he now had an audience. Kathy smiled sadly at her husband's off-key karaoke performance and limped over to the bed. Sleep pulled at her insistently when she sat down, but she managed to remain conscious.

Ten minutes later, the bathroom radio fell silent and the door opened. Mark emerged, shaved and fully dressed, still singing the last song that had been playing on the radio.

"...Just give me a si-i-sign. Unh! And hit me ba—Jesus, Kathy!"

Kathy's lolling head jerked upright, and she forced her eyes open.

"Good morning."

"Where the hell have you been?" her husband demanded. Wisps of steam from the bathroom still clung to his balding scalp and rose from his head like an angry halo. "Bradley went to bed worried sick last night." A long, red-faced pause later, he added, "And so did I."

"I had work to do," Kathy mumbled lamely. "I fell asleep, I guess."

"You guess? Where'd you fall asleep, Kathy? The street?"

Kathy put a hand self-consciously to her lank, wet hair. At least she'd covered the mass of dark-blue bruises on her body before her husband came out.

"It rained," she said. Tiredness and pain mangled the words. A creeping note of hopelessness did its part too. "I walked home in the rain."

"You walked home from the church?" her husband shouted. His expression of angry surprise changed into one of self-satisfied righteousness. "It's ten miles, Kathy!"

"I took a bus for most of it," Kathy muttered. Hopeless frustration sucked all the force out of the lie. "It was raining at both stops."

"Oh, of course," her husband said sarcastically. Anger, bitterness and triumph rolled off him in waves. He knew the advantage in the interrogation was his as long as he didn't let up. "You worked hard all night without bothering to call anyone. Then you took a bus home and walked from the stop in the rain."

He gestured to the bedroom window for emphasis. Kathy could see that clouds were in damn short

supply at the moment. Kathy only shrugged in defeat and refused to look her husband in the eye. She fixed on her husband's pudgy belly and wide, striped tie instead.

"Kathy, did you really think I wouldn't call your office when you never came home?"

"I must have been asleep already."

"At seven?" Kathy didn't say anything to that. "How about at 10:30 when I called again? How about midnight? You must have been really tired, Kathy. When I called your mother and your friends, they all said they'd call the church, too. Were you sleeping when they called?"

Kathy closed her eyes and let her head slump. How easy it would have been to just go to sleep right then.

"You know, it got so late I called Reverend Morris," Kathy's husband said with an angry kind of glee. He knew his wife was caught.

"You woke up our preacher to check on me?" Kathy asked in a hollow voice. "You were that worried, Mark?" She wasn't angry or scared when she said it. She didn't even look up.

"I woke him up," Mark said, "but not because I was worried." He paused for a second, savoring the silent tension like he was delaying an orgasm. He wanted to enjoy his next words as much as possible. He waited until Kathy spoke first.

"Then why did you call him?" she said, too tired and uncomfortable to be impressed by Mark's sense of dramatic timing.

"You're having an affair, aren't you, Kathy?"

"What?"

"Oh, don't even try," Mark said, starting to pace around in his excitement. "It's so obvious. I mean, do you really think I don't know what's going on? You're always working late, but you never call. When you get home, you're too tired to want to have anything to do with me. I try to so much as hug you and you push me away. You never want to talk, and you never listen when I tell you about my day. You don't play with Bradley anymore. None of our friends have seen you in months. You're always taking the bus to work now instead of letting me drive. I get home and the house is a wreck *every single day....* I mean, am I blind or just stupid?"

"I'm not having an affair, Mark," Kathy said. The denial started out with so much tired disgust built in that it might have convinced Mark on the spot, but Kathy's voice cracked around another ball of phlegm. She coughed, and Mark stopped pacing. His eyebrows arched, and his ugly tie hung askew.

"Well," Mark said. "I guess the prosecution rests."

Kathy wished.

"Mark," she said, lifting a weak hand in supplication, "just listen. There are things going on that you don't understand."

"Yeah, I'll bet," Mark said, turning his back on his wife and throwing up his arms. "So who's the lucky guy, Kathy? Must be a real headboard-thumper, huh? Wears you right out, I'll bet. You look like the walking dead."

Kathy covered her face with her hands and started shaking. She was too tired for this. She was going to cry, and if she let that happen, she might tell her husband *everything*. She might tell him where she actually went at night. She might tell him about Mr. Lang, whose funeral had taken place Thursday at the church. She might tell her husband about what had happened at Mr. Lang's house last night.

"So who is it?" Mark said as Kathy's breathing became more ragged. He stood at the foot of the bed and glared down at her. Nasty joy twisted his face into a sadistically gleeful mask. "Anybody I know?"

Kathy lifted her head but kept her hands in front of her mouth. "No, Mark."

"So it's somebody I've never met. I guess that's pretty smart. Wouldn't want a mutual friend spilling the beans, eh?"

"It's nobody, Mark."

"Oh, really?" Mark said, stubbornly determined to jump to the wrong conclusions. Beneath his anger, he almost seemed to be having fun. "Was it some guy you picked up in a bar? Is he some log-pecker who didn't think to look for a wedding ring on your finger? What did you do, Kathy? Did you trick the poor guy, or is his dick just bigger than his IQ? There aren't a lot of hot, single 48-year-olds on the market right now, are there?"

Kathy covered her face with her hands again, but she was no longer on the verge of tears. "Please, Mark," she said. "Bradley might hear you."

"Oh, we're doing this now!" Mark said. "I've got a 'please' for you. Ready? Please, Kathy, come home after work when you're supposed to. Please do your part raising our son. How about this one: Please stop staying out till all hours without calling. Oh, I've got a good one: Please stop sleeping with other men!"

When Mark fell silent at last, Kathy was just able to hear her son's school bus pulling away out front. Maybe the boy hadn't been around to hear any of what his father had been saying.

"You just don't understand, Mark," Kathy whispered.

For his part, Mark might not even have heard the words. He rocked back heavily on his heels, letting his tension flood out in a rush as he looked at the digital

clock on the night table. The burning red numbers told him a story he didn't like.

"Shit!" He darted from the bedside toward the door. "Now I'm gonna be late. Great! Just great, Kathy. Why don't you call ahead and tell my boss why I won't be on time? Go ahead. We'll finish this when I get home. Don't go to work today. I want you here waiting for Bradley when he gets home at three. Explain why you can't be here for him when he needs his mother."

With that final shot, Mark disappeared into the hallway and stormed down the stairs, still cursing. A few seconds later, Kathy heard the door slam. Shortly after that, Mark's car pulled away with a squeal of tires.

Breathing heavily and trying not to sob, Kathy flopped onto her side after Mark left. A tear rolled out between her palms to darken a spot on her pillow, but she otherwise maintained control. She had learned to master her fear the same way — closing her eyes, thinking in silence and breathing hard. She knew she'd been right not to say anything. Mark didn't know what was really going on out there, especially at night. He probably wouldn't be able to handle it. Maybe Kathy had done Mark a favor by letting him believe what his paranoia told him to believe. Being convinced that his wife was sleeping around was certainly safer than knowing the truth. He would sleep better not knowing what was going on. He might not sleep at all if he knew how close he was to the truth of the world. At least now he had something to distract him, just like the billions of other people who didn't know what Kathy knew, about how the world *really* worked.

Kathy's conscience was clear about her fidelity. Maybe she didn't need to feel guilty about misleading her husband. Maybe she'd done the right thing after all. Maybe....

\* \* \*

"Are you sure?" Kathy said to the young man standing beside her.

"I know what I saw," the young man said, zipping his jacket against the wind and drizzling rain. "It was Lang. I saw him right here in his house trying to get out. He was pounding on the windows every time a car went by. I saw his face. He had his widow's peak and his cleft chin, and half his face was missing between his ear and his nose. Right where they say he shot hims—"

"Okay, okay, Ian," Kathy said, raising her hands. She looked up at the house and scanned the windows for any sign of the home's former occupant. "You don't have to try to shock me every time. I just want you to be sure it was him."

"No mistake," Ian said. "He looked right at me in my dream, and he just started screaming. I tried to run, but all the doors were locked. I tried to smash out a window—and that's when I saw the two of us standing outside. Tonight. Talking like we are right now."

Kathy shivered, but not because of the increasing cold. She looked at the windows again. Had something moved on the second floor, or was the house as still and forlorn as it looked? Mr. Lang certainly hadn't kept the place up before he shot himself. Everyone knew how lonely and depressed the retired schoolteacher had been after his wife died and his only daughter moved away to attend college in Bowling Green. The fact that he'd let his home collapse into disrepair should really have come as no surprise. It wouldn't have happened if anyone had cared.

"You haven't been wrong yet," Kathy said, turning back to Ian at last. She saw no fear on his face, but she knew it wasn't far beneath the surface. "Let's go in."

Ian nodded, and the two walked slowly up Mr. Lang's cracked driveway. Sickly, brown weeds poked up through several cracks, and most of the concrete was covered in lumps of wet pine straw. They walked close together, hunched over with their hands in their coat pockets. They were silent for the moment and stole furtive glances at the house's dark windows. Where the driveway curved down to lead behind the house and into the basement-garage, Kathy and Ian cut across the yard. The

rain began to fall more heavily. The overgrown grass caught the rain greedily and tried to hold onto the trespassers' feet. They hurried onto the concrete slab that served as Mr. Lang's front porch.

They paused there. Thick cobwebs filled the corners of the space between the outer screen door and the inner wooden one. The small diamond-shaped window in the wood door showed only darkness inside the house.

"It kinda stinks," Ian said, staring at the rust-spotted doorknob. "You know?"

"What stinks, Ian?" Kathy said. Slowly, the fire of anxiety drained from her. Her fear went somewhere else, shut off like a faucet. Even her voice sounded different. Cold. She straightened her back and squeezed her hands into fists.

"Being right all the time," Ian said with a hollow smile. He shook his head. "It never pays off."

"Open the door, Ian," Kathy said.

Taking a deep, shaking breath that didn't dilute his growing fear, Ian pulled open the flimsy screen door. Its rusted hinges protested with a screech that sounded like a human shriek, like a man screaming in rage or agony. Ian froze, holding the screen open. A shudder ran the length of his body and he drew another deep breath.

"Jesus, that was loud," he said. "Di—did you hear what it sounded like?"



"I'll go first," Kathy said in a voice somewhat less flat than it had been a moment ago. An almost imperceptible tone of disgust had crept in as well. She stepped past Ian and grabbed the rusted doorknob. The door didn't budge, although the knob twisted freely in her hand. She put her shoulder into the effort, with the same results. She gave the door one long, solid push then slammed it hard with a shoulder. When neither technique opened the door, she kicked it once to punctuate her frustration.

When she looked to Ian for help, she saw that the young man's eyes were glassy and that his fingers gripped the aluminum frame of the screen like talons. The rain had started to beat down on the two of them, but Ian didn't even blink. Kathy had to grab the slick sleeve of his jacket and shake him with her free hand before he focused on her. His eyes were still wide and vacant like those of a sleepwalker.

"Ian, what is it?" Fear started to fill her again, although not as badly as it did the young man. "Ian!"

"It's no good," Ian said in a voice that was very small against the rain. "This is Lang's home against the storm. If we let the storm in and he has to leave...."

"What are you talking about?" Kathy said, having to shout over the rain. She shook him again. "What do you see?"

Before Ian could answer, the porch light over their heads suddenly flared to brilliant life and heavy footsteps charged toward the door from inside. When the two intruders looked at the porch light, it went out to be replaced by a light from within the house. The diamond-shaped window gleamed like a lighthouse beacon amid the swirling fog. Lightning flashed behind them and thunder crashed immediately.

"Kathy, get away from the door!"

As she stood staring dumbly at Ian, the doorknob spun in Kathy's hand and jerked her forward. She stumbled into the house, but she couldn't even look around before something grabbed her by the right arm and twisted it backward. An invisible force flung her into the yard, and she rolled awkwardly against the trunk of a dark, wet pine tree. The same force yanked Ian into the house, beyond Kathy's line of sight. His face reappeared momentarily at the window, but he only slapped his palms against the glass once before disappearing again into the darkness.

Kathy tried to stand, but bolts of pain in her shoulder and knee drove her back down. She hit her head hard on the ground, and her eyes fluttered shut. The last thing she saw was the light in the front hall going out and the door swinging shut with a sharp bang. A bang like a gunshot.

\* \* \*

Kathy sat up in bed, her head full of cotton. She'd either fallen asleep or passed out. Although she still

wincing from a headache, the fact that she'd awakened soothed her fear that she might have a concussion. Looking around blearily, she realized that she was still in her bathrobe and her legs still dangled halfway off the bed.

Pulling herself to her feet, she staggered back to her closet and put on the last set of clean clothes she had. Her joints creaked like those of a 70-year-old and her heart hammered so fast she couldn't breathe normally, but the fresh outfit made her feel slightly better. Kathy felt the same steely reserve and determination that had filled her before she'd entered Mr. Lang's house last night. She limped to the phone on her nightstand and dialed a number, hoping desperately for an answer.

Ian's voice brought her a welcome relief. "Kathy," he said with cold venom in his voice. "You're alive!"

"I'm sorry," Kathy said, looking ashamedly at the floor. "I didn't know what happened to you."

"You don't want to," Ian said. "I saw him. Just like in the dream. I saw him, and he wouldn't let me out. And you didn't help me. I thought you were dead. Where were you? Why didn't you help me?"

A tear squeezed out of Kathy's eye and rolled down her cheek. The tiny, sickly seed of anger was gone from Ian's voice, and only the fear remained. He sounded close to tears himself. He sounded like a little boy who wanted nothing more than to curl up against his mother's breast and be rocked to sleep.

"I'm sorry," Kathy said. Her voice was hoarse with phlegm. "If I could have helped you, I would have. Tonight it'll be different. When we go back, I won't—"

"Back? Kathy, I don't even know how I got out. I was lying behind some garbage cans two blocks from Lang's place when I woke up this morning. Kathy, some of my hair's white. I don't think I can go—"

Kathy looked at the clock beside the phone. It was quarter past two. Her son would be home in 45 minutes.

"Ian, we don't have time for this," she said. "I know what we have to do, but we have to get started now."

"What?"

"We're going to burn the house down," Kathy said. "Lang is tied to it. If we burn it down, he'll be destroyed. I think that's what 'letting the storm in' means. Do you remember saying that?"

"Yeah," Ian said, getting a bit of a hold on himself.

"We're going to get this over with. It won't take very long, and we don't have to go in. Nothing's going to happen this time. Everything's going to be okay."

"I don't want to go back in there," Ian said. He sounded drained, defeated and very young.

"We're not going in," she said. "We're going to burn the place down. That's what we should have done in the first place. We were stupid. We're not going to make the same mistake."

"Do we have to go now?" Ian asked. "It looks like it's starting to rain again...."

"Ian, listen," Kathy said. "My son's coming home from school soon. I don't want to have to explain where I'm going or what I'm doing or *who you are* if you get here after he does. I just want to put this to rest as fast as we can. We'll both be able to sleep again once Lang is gone for good. You told me you'd help, Ian. This is what we need to do."

Ian finally agreed, and the two of them made a tentative plan of attack. Once Kathy hung up, she

made her way painfully and slowly along the hall, then down the stairs to the front door. She struggled into her jacket — still musty and stiff from the night before — and went outside. It was 2:30 when Ian finally showed up in a dirty, well-traveled Honda Civic. Neither of them spoke. They drove away thinking only that they'd never have to deal with Lang again once this day was over.

Absorbed in their fear, their pain and their desperate plans, neither of them looked back at Kathy's house. Neither of them saw the window beside the front door darken from within. Neither saw the ashen hand that pressed against the glass, or the ghastly, wrecked face that hovered beside it.



# INTRODUCTION

*I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh, for, just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

— Romans 6:19

**Hunter: The Reckoning** is the game in the Storyteller system about the common, mortal human. Rather than play the monsters of the World of Darkness, it offers you the chance to be the lowly victim of monstrous predation. You had a regular life before, with a job, perhaps a family and certainly your share of responsibilities. The things you cared about were everyday, even mundane. You would still live that life now, except you seem to have been chosen or forced to witness the reality of your world — that monsters exist, prowl the shadows and prey upon the unwitting — they prey upon what you used to be. Now, for whatever reason or by whatever means, you continue to see these things and have been bestowed inexplicable and frightening capabilities with which to respond to them. Of course, no one else understands what you now take as fact, and no one can help you cope with the truth except

those few others who have also been shown. Now, you must cope with a life and perhaps fate that is far from mundane, despite your humblest desires.

The **Hunter** rulebook and other supplements for the game allow you to play these normal people in abnormal circumstances. You can create the character — the person — you want and then watch as his life is turned upside-down by the discovery of the supernatural. Now, though, you hold another very important tool to help define your hunter, his beliefs, his values and his crusade. The **Hunter Players Guide** is full of new rules, guidelines and possibilities for your chronicle and unsung heroes. This book offers new character types to play, optional ways to direct and even reinvent your character, and even new Traits to help embellish the person you create. Although all **Hunter** books offer something to players of the

**OPTIONAL RULES AND SYSTEMS**

This book suggests several new ways to interpret **Hunter** and your character's possibilities, and offers the mechanics you need to make them a part of your game. Almost all of these systems are optional—they're not an official part of the game. You and your Storyteller must agree that new rules and interpretations of the imbued are true and good for your chronicle before you can introduce them. Don't just show up for your next game with a new creed for your character, for example, just because the means to change it are offered in these pages. Your Storyteller and the other troupe members must all be willing to use the new ideas, too. That way, no one is left out and everyone can enjoy the game.

Each optional system and rule in this book is identified as such. Consider this book a collection of new opportunities to expand the horizons of your chronicle.

game—the people outside the Storyteller's screen—this book is dedicated to you and your character.

**THE LOST CREEDS**

Perhaps the most significant single concept introduced in this book is that of the "lost creeds"—two imbued mindsets, mentalities and possibilities that are officially presented here for the first time. These previously "undisclosed" followers of the Vision Virtue have not been unveiled before because they are very few, even among the small numbers of the chosen. To the eye of any other creed member, these people would not particularly stand out as unique groups or with outlooks unto themselves. Rather, they would seem like fringe members of other groups—bizarre extremists or nonconformists who were on their own strange paths. In other words, they would seem like almost any other hunter whom one might meet and misunderstand in all the confusion, fear and anxiety that arises after the imbuing.

As hunters make efforts to communicate and share ideas, values and goals, however, some pattern recognition emerges. Certain camps of chosen uphold revenge against the monsters for the crimes they've committed against the world. Others champion salvation of souls, even ones that might remain in monsters. Still others suggest that neither destruction nor salvation is important until the very nature of monsters, hunters and reality itself is understood.

While lines separating these groups can certainly blur, as philosophical recognition settles in, the beliefs and actions of a select few still stand out as extraordinary, inexplicable and even abhorrent. Many imbued might dismiss these seeming aberrations as hunters who've gone too far in their calling and gone mad as a result. And yet, anyone who had the fortune or misfortune of knowing them before might counter that these people had behaved so from their change, from the beginning.

And thus, two more intense and extreme philosophies about the hunt emerge—that of Hermits, imbued seen to isolate themselves from society, but more accurately from other hunters and monsters; and that of Waywards, murderers, assailants and psychopaths of an almost perverse magnitude. Whereas Avengers once seemed aggressive, the second of these new groups proves that even the Vengeful have morals, scruples and limits.

But where do these outcasts and pariahs come from, and why would the Messengers create them if they seem so dysfunctional and dangerous? What hunter can posit a reasonable answer when so little is known about "sane" imbued, or about monsters or about the origins of the Heralds? It seems simply that the Hermits and Waywards exist, like a band on the spectrum that was previously invisible to the naked eye but was always there, contributing to the light.

The irony is that, if these people truly are dysfunctional, seeming throwbacks of the hunt, why do they of all imbued seem to have the most and closest contact with the Heralds?

This **Players Guide** offers an introductory look at the two "lost" Vision creeds. Each receives a description like those of the established hunter creeds, as seen in the rulebook. The supplements **Hunter Book: Hermit** and **Hunter Book: Wayward** elaborate further on these few imbued, offering greater insights into their origins, seeming purpose-gone-astray and cryptic future. Those books also detail full edges and other rules for these hunters. Without them, apply all normal **Hunter** character-creation rules for embodying one of these people, in addition to those rules provided in the creed write-ups here.

**HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

The **Hunter Players Guide** is absolutely jammed with rules, ideas and suggestions for your character, and for new ones that you might want to play. It's one big reference tool from which you may draw inspiration to give your hunter texture and direction. There's something for everyone in these pages.

The Hermit and Wayward creed profiles are largely self-explanatory, in combination with what's said above.

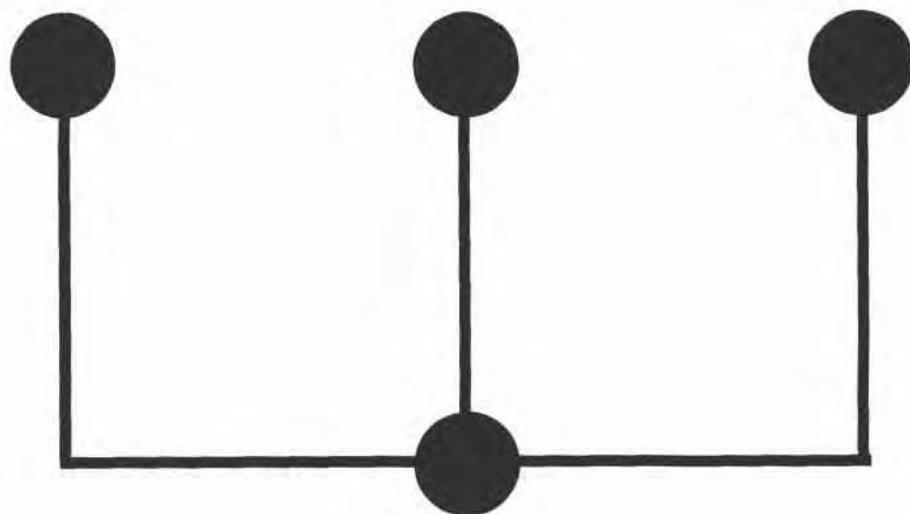
**Chapter 1: Bystanders** introduces so-called "duds" or "failed hunters" as character types. Who ever said that standing still at the imbuing meant a person was forever useless to the hunt? Bystanders even offer a few surprises of their own.

**Chapter 2: Rules of Engagement** addresses new ways to approach character creation, such as different definitions of what a mundane person actually is — in game terms — and the sticky issue of True Faith in **Hunter**.

**Chapter 3: New Traits** offers classic Merits and Flaws, **Hunter**-style. These are not the Traits you might expect, given other Storyteller games. The nature of Backgrounds and their development in play is also explored.

**Chapter 4: The Measure of Humanity** looks at ways to understand and consider your character as an everyday person, and how his identity can impact the hunt.

**Chapter 5: Make Your Own Fate** investigates ways your character can determine the direction of her life and your chronicle. She might be one woman against nightmarish supernatural beings, but she isn't powerless to make an impression.





Eduardo '99

# Hermit

William checked his watch again by the glow of the street light. Quarter-past nine. The wind gusted around his feet, blowing papers about and chilling him. He thrust his hands back into his pockets and shuffled uncomfortably. Quarter-past nine on a cold, dull fall night. *It would be quiet. It had to be quiet. There wasn't much time left.* Resolved, he set off along the empty sidewalk.

As he approached the grocery store, he could see light flooding forth coldly from its windows, throwing everything nearby into stark relief against the night. He got close and looked in, checking one of the aisles. No one around. Good. He moved quickly to the next pane and glanced in again. Still empty, apart from one clerk. He sighed, relieved, and entered. The girl at the cash register didn't even glance up from her magazine.

William grabbed a basket and hurried down an aisle. He moved around the store quickly, almost aimlessly, grabbing a few things from the shelves. Cornflakes. Peas. Juice. Ground beef. Just odds and ends. Enough that anyone could see it was food for a few days. He didn't look closely at what he was selecting. It was all the same, really. A quick dash through the store and he had enough. He looked around again, but he was still the only customer. He crossed reluctantly over to the checkout counter and put his basket next to the till. The girl looked up, dull-eyed and sullen at being disturbed, a greasy lick of blonde hair hanging in front of her face.

She pushed the hair back and forced a disinterested smile. "Is that everything, sir?" Her voice was a flat, hostile, nasal whine. William just nodded. "Would you like a bag?" she asked, as if she expected him to carry everything in his hands. He nodded again, and she started ringing up items and bagging them for him.

He looked around the store once more, nervous. Still empty, thank God. The world beyond the store window also seemed devoid of life. Not even car headlights broke the desolation. A noise interrupted his scrutiny of the street. He looked at the girl blankly.

"That'll be \$18.36 please." She sounded impatient, unfriendly.

William reached into his pocket, pulled out a twenty and threw it down on the counter to avoid contact with the cashier. Rather than wait for his change, he grabbed the bag and made straight for the exit before anyone else came along. Around the corner of the store, beyond the light, he paused to catch his breath. There, that wasn't so bad. He shifted his groceries in his arms and headed for home.

As William approached the turn to his street he heard voices - loud, angry voices. He flinched and looked around wildly. A group of teenagers had stopped a man, a business type in his forties. It looked as if they were bumming change. William froze, horrified. Suddenly, a gale blew up behind him, whipping his clothes, and a voice that sounded as if it were from the pits of hell whispered, "DEATH LOOMS." The words ripped through him, though no one else seemed to hear them. William tensed in anticipation. Suddenly, a storm of voices, images and impressions rose, welling up as transient shards in his mind. "THE CHILDREN OF"- "IT WALKS"- "THEY SAY"- "WITH THEM"- "IT MUST"- a black-eyed child suckling at its mother's breast- "THIS EVIL"- "THE MOTHER KNEW"- "ADEPTS"- "TO DRINK"- a beetle crossing loose, bare earth- "OF OLD"- "FEEDING"- "NOT BE PERMITTED"- "AMONGST MANKIND"- "DEALING"- a man in unlikely glasses staring- "OF THE UNWARY"- "HAVE A WAY"- "THEM."

William roared, his own voice hoarse in his ears but still not loud enough to drown out the interior clamor. And somehow, despite the cascade, he was still aware of the group ahead. His mind felt torn, fragments of him forced to pay attention to myriad conversations and images, while still looking out at the world. The man in the suit was wrong, corrupted, rotting. His flesh was a clammy gray; his throat, a mass of torn, protruding tissue; his fingernails, abnormally long and sharp.

All of them, kids and thing, looked at William, their stares like hammer blows. William wanted to turn and run, somewhere, anywhere. The teenagers clearly didn't understand, couldn't hear the crush of voices, couldn't see that the man was dead. The threat needed to be made clear in terms they could comprehend. If William couldn't make it clear, claws and fangs certainly would.

"He's going to kill you," William shouted. "He... he's got a knife." The kids started backing away, and the thing surged forward, grabbing one of them by the throat. Thin trickles of blood showed where long claws broke the boy's skin. The other kids ran. The thing turned to look for a moment at William, threw the injured boy to the ground and fled.

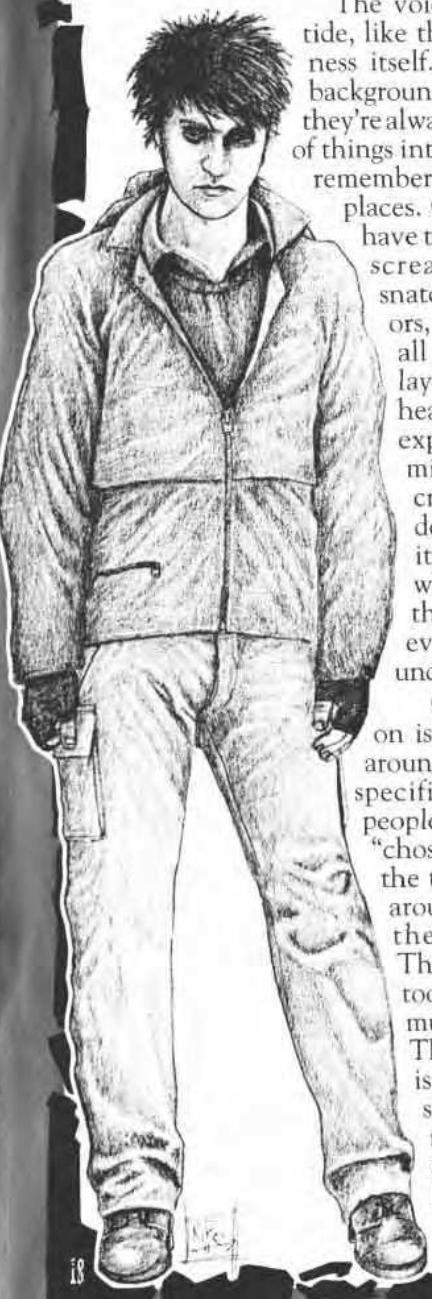
William pressed his hands to his head, praying for the pounding to stop. It seemed to diminish a little once the monster was gone.

*Shut up. Please, shut up. You're not making this any easier.*

# THE LOST

You were always a good communicator. A problem solver. Taking the long view was vital to getting perspective on whatever was happening, whether in politics, a relationship or just in a crowded room. You knew how to convey information, to show people what they hadn't considered. Most importantly, you knew how to listen. All of these capabilities might have been professional if you were a counselor, teacher or social worker. Maybe you were just the one your friends turned to. Whichever it was, listening, considering and talking were probably the most natural parts of your personality and life.

Now they bring you pain.



The voices ebb and flow like the tide, like the seasons, like consciousness itself. They might fade to the background or crash to the fore, but they're always there, cramming all sorts of things into your head. Strange, half-remembered glimpses of unknown places. Odd words that seemingly have to be whispered to you—or screamed at you. Cryptic snatches of haunting verse. Colors, shapes, smells—any and all sensory input, layer upon layer, crashing through your head until it feels like you'll explode. But you don't. Your mind just gets more and more crowded. The clamor usually doesn't make sense—mostly it's just random static—but when it does, you've learned that it's important, maybe even life-saving. If you can understand it, that is.

One thing you noticed early on is that the voices are worse around other people. Or more specifically, around crowds of people with others who had been "chosen" hidden inside. A lot of the time you can handle being around some people—until the wrong kind turn up. They've been shown the truth, too, but together you know too much for you alone to handle. The Messengers, or whatever is to blame, barrage you with signs that another hunter is nearby, like you're supposed to do something about it. But what can you do when

you're being deafened? If don't learn how to ignore the voices, you'll go nuts.

Then there are the *things*, the monsters. You can see them for sure. They aren't alive or even human, and they can make the voices and flashes almost unbearable, too.

When you discover that there are other "imbued" out there like you—and then things that you can't even describe—you want to warn everyone. You want to tell what you know and empty out all the chaos in your head. But all the noise makes it hard to be around anyone who could understand, so it's hard to share what you know you have to. That means some of you never come to terms with your calling. A few just run away, trying to get as far from everyone as possible. When you're completely alone, with no one else near, the voices almost fall silent. Unfortunately, you don't have the luxury of retreating from the world and the truth. You know you can save people, if you can find it in you.

The two pressures that build in you, to silence the voices and to pass on what you experience, seem almost contradictory. That makes your new life hard, maybe harder than any person was meant to handle. Remember that no matter how bad it gets, no matter how far you run or how deep you hide, you're never alone in your pain. There are others who can understand you, if you can bear their presence.

Given who you might have been before, your aptitudes probably lie in information gathering and distribution, whether you know it or not. Being artistic is perhaps the most natural form of communication. There can be as much artistry in conveying information through journalism, research or programming as there is in painting or sculpture. Maybe your open mind or free spirit is what lets God or the Messengers or whatever to be in constant contact. You're quicker to listen than you are to fight or pass judgment. When the voices do share something intelligible, it's almost always critically important to you or someone around you. With such information at your disposal, and your talent for passing it on—whether as a writer, public speaker, web designer or illustrator—you're instrumental to the hunt. Your input, when you can control it, can help set goals, establish plans and avoid tragedy.

But all that comes at a terrible price. Every time you force yourself to go out there, the chorus gets louder and more painful until you're convinced you're going mad—or you already are. You won't do anyone any good in a straightjacket, though. It's a balancing act of finding your inner peace while continuing the fight. No one promised the hunt would be easy. But then, no one offered you a choice at all.

**Weaknesses:** It should come as no surprise that you have problems dealing with other people. Psychologists talk about "aversion therapy," training yourself to dislike

something by associating it with pain. If that's not what's happening to you, it's damn close. You're withdrawn because that's the only way you can find peace. You can be paranoid, aggressive, depressed or even manic around other people, because it hurts to be around other imbued. And how do you tell them from anyone normal?

But the real risk lies in losing track of *why* you suffer. You might refuse to have anything to do with the calling, or even with other people. Your pain may become a general hatred of others in general, and of monsters and the imbued in particular. You can grow really bitter and twisted. You need to avoid both traps if you want to hold onto anything of yourself from before.

**Apocrypha:** You might be somebody who always shunned company, who lives in his own head, who feels that what goes on there is far more interesting than anything happening out in the world. Somebody who sees this ugly, monster-riddled reality as God's punishment for having turned your back on the world. Or did you always feel unworthy to breathe the same air as "normal" people, until you realized they need someone like you to save them from the *abnormals* they can't see?

Or maybe you're more in touch. So in touch that your quest for meaning in it all succeeded in ways you never imagined possible. You saw people numb themselves to life and swore you'd find a better way for people to live. Did you look inside yourself, only to find God and Satan, and somehow unleash both as walking — if not always breathing — aspects of your own will? You know something changed, and recently, but most people missed it and still do. Somebody has to make them all see, and you mean to find a way.

Or are you the once-gregarious type who feels attacked by unseen forces that want you to understand what's at stake yet also want you to do nothing about it? People matter to you more than your own comfort, though, so you periodically sacrifice it for them. You isolate yourself only reluctantly because you know that no man is an island... unless he lets himself become one. And your greatest fear is that such surrender into self-imprisonment is what (and how) your invisible tormentors hope to win. One person at a time...

**The Imbuing:** When your first message comes, it probably isn't an isolated phrase like other imbued describe. It's the opening of a floodgate. That first, clear signal starts a deluge, and in the confusion of sensory input and the sudden horror of seeing monsters, you probably recoil or withdraw and take stock of the scene before doing anything. You don't flee altogether, but you certainly see and skirt the action while you try to understand what's going on, to comprehend what's happening and pass that information or warning on to anyone who

would understand or even listen. Insight, perspective and direction are as active as swinging a fist or lending a hand.

**Character Creation:** Hermits typically have high scores in Perception and other Mental Traits, and they place minimal emphasis on Social Attributes. Knowledges are commonly valued over Talents and Skills. Every Hermit gets the Patron Background, rated 3, automatically and for free (levels 4 and 5 can be acquired as if they were ratings 1 and 2, respectively). Hermits also start play with a derangement that hampers social interaction considerably, such as Hysteria, Manic-Depression or Paranoia. While within 100 feet or so of monsters or other imbued, all of a Hermit's difficulties increase by one. Zeal edges are uncommon compared to Vision's, followed by Mercy's.

#### Starting Conviction: 3

**A.K.A.:** Ostriches, Loners, Schizos, Outsiders

#### STEREOTYPES

**Avengers** — "Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

**Bystanders** — A joy to be with compared to the rest. Amazingly, we can approach some of them without invoking the noise — and they understand what it's like to be on the outside looking in.

**Defenders** — Their concern for others means they're interested in any useful information. Unfortunately, their opinion of "useful" can be narrow.

**Innocents** — Gentle people, if naive. Some of them can even be quite soothing company. Though they almost always listen, they sometimes pay attention to *how* you say something, not *what* you say.

**Judges** — For all their claims of impartiality, they can be extremely stubborn when they think they know what's right.

**Martyrs** — They feel the pain of the hunt so keenly that they neglect their own well being, sometimes suicidally. We can sympathize.

**Redeemers** — Not everyone can be saved. They don't all want to hear that, though.

**Visionaries** — Extremely creative, full of ideas, always questioning. If they could only see inside our heads, they'd have all the answers.

**Waywards** — Lunatics, every last one, even if they are absolutely committed. At least they're interested in tactical information. It's a miracle that maniac on TV didn't try hacking up the talk-show host, instead.

**The Enemy** — They're to blame for all of this. We have to stop them from preying on mankind. Maybe then the voices will go away.

# Hermit



Edwards 99

# Wayward

I was heading across town on an "errand" when I noticed an odd group of people near an alleyway. They were a real mixed bunch - a Latina, a gloomy looking guy in dark clothes, a soccer mom, a nerdy kid and a too-tough-for-you Asian. That made me suspicious enough to make a detour. Sure enough, the nerd had our sign drawn on his bag. I approached them to see if I could get any more leads to pursue. The Asian checked me out - probably that way - and gave a quick "okay" to the rest.

I put on a reassuring smile. "Hey. How's it going?"

"I don't mean to be rude, sir, but we're kind of busy," the nerd said nervously.

Holding the left side of my coat closed to keep my shotgun hidden, I opened the right so they could see the sign I had sewn into the lining. "I'm a 'friend.'" They all seemed relieved, 'Mom' in particular.

"I'm Rod," the nerd said. "This is blah, blah, blah..." I didn't try to keep up with who was who. I didn't need to. I smiled again and gave some name back. You'd think it was a fucking dinner party.

"How did you recognize us?" the Latina asked.

I snorted before I could stop myself, so had to follow up with something appropriate. "Look at yourselves. You're all totally different. There isn't anything you'd all be doing together - and you're obviously not related. Office parties don't usually spread to the street. You people stand out like a sore thumb."

They exchanged nervous glances.

"We can't be that obvious," the Latina said.

"I noticed you. Take my advice: If you need to be together, split into small groups or dress the same. What are you all up to, anyway?"

The gloomy one spoke for the first time. "We're observing, um... a lost soul. I think we can save her." The others nodded seriously, like reconciliation was some sort of option.

Damned, then, the lot. It didn't mean they couldn't be useful, though. I made a broader smile. "Sounds good. What have you got?"

"She's down the alley," the nerd said. "We've decided to make contact - approach her as a group."

I had to remain calm. "That might scare it - her. One person should talk to her, persuade her to come and see you," I pointed to the gloomy one, "who'll be up here. The rest of us can circle around so we can provide backup, but won't be a threat." They seemed impressed with the idea.

"Why don't I just go talk to her?" Gloomy asked.

"It's safer to get her to a different position so she's not completely in her element if things go wrong." I looked from person to person, and everyone nodded agreeably. Mom volunteered to go get the thing once everyone was "in position."

I waited with Gloomy until the others headed off, then led him down the alley a bit. It was cluttered with crates, boxes and other trash.

"She's not far ahead," he said.

There was plenty of cover in both directions. I looked at the kid. "Can you point out her position?" As he turned to look down the alley, I pulled my knife, clamped a hand over his mouth and put him out of his misery. I hid the corpse under some trash and headed back out. When I caught up with the others, they were almost in position at the other end.

"Everything okay?" the Latina asked.

"He's right where he belongs," I said, smiling genuinely for once.

We moved into the alley from the other end. About 50 feet away, the Asian said he had a clear view of where the thing was holed up. It was time to send Mom in. She really didn't seem nervous, the stupid bitch. She went up to the cardboard box where the thing lived, I guess, and called out a greeting. It poked its head out, sick with taint, and actually fucking started talking. I focused on the rage I felt deep inside, let it surge up and fill me. Then I focused on Mom, on her feeling like I did. The fury poured out of me, into her. Her reaction was immediate. She leaped at the thing, clawing like some sort of playground fighter. The thing ripped out her throat.

That's when some of the assholes finally showed some sense and wanted to fight. I guess no one noticed that I had my shotgun out - not till I opened up on the whole alley. After I finished the thing, I realized that the Latina was still alive. She mumbled something like "Why," blood bubbling on her lips.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' remember?" I don't think she heard word one.

We don't judge. We send the wicked to Him for that. Get in the way and you can go be judged, too.

The others just don't get it. This isn't some sort of intellectual exercise that's up for debate. Monsters are not sad, sympathetic creatures. This isn't even a war. In war, there are codes and conventions, rules and regulations. This is the last desperate struggle to survive in the face of utter evil. Half-measures won't do. You can't afford to be squeamish or worry about ethics. The monsters and all the other scum have to be destroyed, every last one of them. No matter what the cost. Even if it takes every last drop of blood of every person on Earth, it'll still be a bargain. At least we'll know that none of them are left.

Maybe it's because the rest don't have the clarity that you do. Compared to you, the other "chosen" seem as blind and deaf as the rest of humanity. Being able to see the abominations all the time, day and night, really hammers home how foul and corrupt the world is. That's what sets you apart. You see the big picture. You see it all the time, without a break. The others can retreat into their own little lives, away from the truth, pretending that everything is all right for a while. But they're lying to themselves. They lack focus. Their priorities are all fucked up — like family or a job or hopes matter. In the end, you're the only one with true commitment, the only one prepared to pay any price. That means everyone else is expendable and you're not.

Granted, you may have been like them at one time, living a regular life and going to church or whatever. But seeing *all the time* shows you how false your old life was, and why it's all but forgotten now. Who you were *before* just doesn't matter anymore. Now, only the hunt matters.

That means nothing from before is important compared to the cause. Don't be fooled by the old laws you used to respect. They were created by the enemy to make people cattle. You're above the law now. Above society. If the

only way to get to a monster is through a human shield, so be it. Every life you have to take now will save countless lives in the future. Working with other imbued is fine, so long as they don't slow you down. Some of them talk a good fight, but when it comes to burning down a project to get the rats inside, they lose their stomach for it. That means you avoid revealing too much about yourself or your plan to anyone. You never know when an "ally" might turn out to be monster-friendly. Look out for yourself first.

You have no one else to turn to.

**Weaknesses:** While the others are in for a penny, you're in for a pound. But believe it or not, you can go too far. No one else has your dedication, but your strength can turn against you in little ways. You can't kill monsters if you're dead. You need to be patient. Go in guns blazing and you'll get killed. Go in with a cool head and a plan, and you can get the job done. Why fight face to face when you can set a monster nest on fire and just be another gawker in the crowd that gathers to watch?

At the same time, remember that there are lots of monsters out there. Too much planning for one lets the others get away. If you waste time on a target that doesn't warrant it, you need to step back — or maybe go in with guns blazing just to get your head on straight again. If you need a frontal assault, get some of the losers to go in front of you. As the most important soldier in this fight, you need to live to fight another day.

**Apocrypha:** Some of you know that society is a lie. Why perpetuate it. And why bother wondering *Why me? Why now?* when you've clearly been *chosen*. Understand that you have to become more than human to win. That makes everyone else window-dressing. When the war is over, the monsters will be gone — and all the criminals, sinners and unbelievers with them.

Others among you insist on maximum efficiency in eradi-



cating the filth, setting aside compassion and even the rage that invigorates some, to opt for cool, calm expediency. You're methodical and completely ruthless, evaluating everything and everyone in terms of the mission at hand. You think you'll make the world — and yourselves — whatever you want. Hell, given the shape of things, you might be right.

Sad but true, some of you out there are weak. God knows how you got the job. You still do what they have to, but you hold on to some of who you were before, as if the past has anything to do with the present or future. Some even live in denial of what you've become and what you do, blanking out memories of your actions even as you perform them, or vacillating over what obviously has to be done. As if you can save the world and have a conscience.

**The Imbuing:** Chances are, you've always had a lot of hate in you, whether you denied it or reveled in it. Or maybe you never wanted to hate anyone before, but now it's the only thing that makes sense. It's nothing to be ashamed of; there's plenty to hate in this world. It's a maggot-ridden piece of shit, populated by perverts, the unworthy and — you see, once the scales fall from your eyes — the inhuman. You're chosen to make a difference because of your superiority and purity, no matter how deep down you hid it before. So, when you see the abominations, your response is absolute, immediate and without remorse for anyone — and that sets the tone for the rest of your life.

**Character Creation:** Waywards concentrate on Physical Attributes, plus combat and survival Skills, with Mental Traits and Knowledges coming second. Edges are usually from Vision or Zeal. All Waywards have permanent second sight. It's active constantly, for free. And yet, they are unable to have any edge (Discern, Witness or Illuminate) that differentiates

#### STEREOTYPES

**Avengers** — Getting revenge is admitting to being a victim.

**Bystanders** — Who?

**Defenders** — They're fools to think that they can hold on to anything.

**Hermits** — Watching accomplishes nothing, but they know some useful shit.

**Innocents** — Just go kill yourselves. At least that idiot on the television tried. What do the rest of you have to offer?

**Judges** — What's to decide? There's "kill" or "die."

**Martyrs** — If they're so quick to get themselves killed, round them up and send them in ahead of you.

**Redeemers** — Monster-loving traitors.

**Visionaries** — They have their heads stuck up their asses, but somewhere up there they can find plans for the future — namely, how to completely wipe out the enemy.

**The Enemy** — Destroy them by any means necessary.

among types of monsters. Simple targets are all that matter to these people. All Waywards start play with a derangement such as Megalomania, Multiple Personalities, Fugue or Schizophrenia that, in their case, makes them violent and desensitized to suffering.

**Starting Conviction:** 4

**A.K.A.:** Psychos, Terrorists, Serial Killers, Hate-Mongers

# Wayward



# CHAPTER I: BYSTANDERS

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

—Psalms 119:176

## PROLOGUE: FALSE START

Alison placed the newspaper on the table. Weary, tired and yet wide blue eyes looked over the arrangement. One *Daily Herald* folded in half: magazines and other inserts removed. Next to that, one pipe, one pack of tobacco lying by its side: no match or lighter. One scotch glass: empty.

Richard liked his evening read to be orderly. Alison liked to avoid confrontation.

She brushed aside a lock of thinning blond hair and straightened the paper. One last check, she thought. One last check. No subscription notices. No magazines folded in. One last check. Make sure everything was right, and Richard would be happy. If Richard was happy, he didn't make a fuss or ask questions. One last check. The paper was straight, and no pages were missing. It was 20 past seven.

Richard always woke at the same time. When he emerged from his room, he smelled and looked like he'd showered. He was wearing a dark-blue jacket and matching pants. His socks were a shade lighter, and they matched the handkerchief peeking out from his pocket. His tie was the same shade as his jacket, and his copper tiepin contrasted nicely. Not a single

winkle. Like he himself, Richard's taste in clothes didn't change any more.

*The doorbell rings, and Richard smiles as he rises from the dinner table to answer it. Bobby asks for more sausages, and I tell him he's had enough. Both of us jump up when the opening door is followed by a hideous wet thud and a crash that fills the house.*

Richard smiled to Alison as he walked into the room. She smiled back on cue, hers just as genuine as his. He walked to the table, and she pulled out the chair. He started turning pages.

"How was your day?" Richard asked.

"Good." Alison recited.

*I run to the door in a panic. I'm torn between crying out for my husband and telling my son to run away, and I do neither. There's no second chance as a woman who wears torn flannel grabs me. I think her nails dig into my neck. Bobby runs into the hallway to see what's happening.*

He didn't say anything more, but he put his hand around the dry scotch glass and never raised it to his lips. The headline screamed about home invasions. Richard shook his head. "I just can't believe the stuff in here. Horrible. There are animals in this neighborhood."

Alison held her tongue and tried desperately to keep her face emotionless as she listened. He hadn't complained about the paper, she reassured herself. That was good. The scotch glass was where it was supposed to be. As Richard put the empty and unlit pipe to his lips, Alison relaxed a little. It would be all right. It would be over soon.

*I scream as the woman drags me into the garage with one hand. She has Bobby in the other. Richard lies on the floor, the back of his head covered in blood, from when he hit the mirror across from the door, I guess. She throws me into the garage, and I hit my head on the cold floor. Bobby follows, but she throws him against the far wall. Blood fills my eye. Bobby's crying echoes through the garage.*

*She walks over and forces me into a plastic yard chair, then she grabs some rope from the tool shelf and ties my wrists behind me. I scream for help, but no one answers. Bobby gets up, staggering to the door. The woman shrieks at him as she knocks him down. He's bleeding. He has to be alive.*

Richard read the financial section closely, but he glossed over the sports. His hand returned to his glass. He drew on the pipe without results. Alison waited patiently, silently, speaking when spoken to.

It was 20 to eight. Richard had to be at work in just under an hour. He'd stop reading. It would all be over

soon. Sure enough, Richard stood. "Thank you. I'm going to check on the rabbits before I go."

Alison closed her eyes for a second in anticipation. Richard leaned over, kissed her cheek and walked out the back door.

*She punches Bobby in the face, just to make sure. I whimper, but she doesn't seem to notice. My wrists hurt. Grinning, the woman leaves the garage and goes inside, closing the door behind her. I can't see Richard any more. I don't know why she's doing this.*

*A lot of time passes — an hour? I struggle with the ropes, screaming until my throat is raw. I don't know who she is. I don't know why she's doing this.*

*Bobby just lays there, his eyes closed. He doesn't answer. He has to be alive.*

*Suddenly the woman comes back, mostly carrying Richard to keep him on his feet. His eyes are glazed over. With a jerk, she kisses him roughly. He doesn't respond. Blood runs down his cheek and neck. Finally, the woman throws him to the garage floor where he lays still. Please don't let him be dead.*

*The woman kicks him and mutters, "Come on. Get up. Don't screw around with me anymore." And then... he moans. He rises, disoriented, his eyes coming back to life.*

*But I don't see my husband. I see a chalk-white man, nearly a skeleton. His veins stand out red and blue, pulsing slowly. I feel my stomach drop and my*



skin crawl. I look away to the wall, but it's no relief. I'm startled to see the words "THE DEAD LIVE" written in red. Blood? But then they're gone, a figment of my imagination.

"Richard" lurches toward me while the woman smiles and watches. He's stumbling like a puppet with its strings cut. He stands over me, leering, but then sad, as if trying to fight back some horrible impulse. Somehow, I realize I can ease his suffering with a word. I can comfort him and tell him everything will be all right. I know I can stop him even while I sit here, tied. But as I look up, all I can see now is the man I married.

*I close my eyes and try desperately to forget what I've seen. I try to ignore the feeling of his mouth on my neck. I can't stop him. I love him.*

Alison fell onto the couch, crying, pretending she didn't hear the door to the rabbit hutch open. She'd done everything right! Everything! He didn't usually go to the hutch if she did everything right. "What did I do wrong?"

Then Alison bolted up, alert. Bobby's room faced the hutch. "Bobby," she called, "Close your window."

\* \* \*

Keeping Richard fed and satisfied was expensive. Alison spent close to 140 dollars a week on rabbits. If she bought them all from one store, the employees became suspicious, so she had to buy from a breeder one week, a store the next and a different breeder the week after. That meant a lot of driving and a gas bill to show for it. Blocking up all the windows wasn't expensive — pieces of cardboard and heavy drapes worked, but the photography equipment she kept in the garage as an explanation for the windows was costly.

The emotional toll on Alison and Bobby was incalculable. They lived a nightmare. Their old lives seemed like memories that weren't worth preserving. Alison was now certain that they had owned a dog once. She couldn't remember it, but she couldn't think of any other reason to have a dog bed and cans of food in the cupboard. It seemed like she was in constant pain for a while, then she went dead inside and couldn't feel at all anymore. But then things would happen that reminded her that everything was wrong — like driving for over an hour just to go to a pet store.

Returning from one such trip, she realized that her house was in the worst condition it had been in since the night the woman came. The TV had been pushed over and smashed. The VCR was missing. Alison put down the cage she carried. Her eyes flickered, and she felt faint. Months of living with and serving a blood-drinking husband hadn't deadened her completely to the sense of violation and fear that came with the break-in. She walked to the bedroom and saw that her jewelry was gone or

broken. The window coverings were torn down, but there was no sign of life.

Richard had been in his basement workshop the night before. He must have spent the day there. Alison wasn't sure if that was a blessing or a curse.

She walked to the kitchen and found a carpet of broken glass. Richard's scotch glass was shattered. She could have cried, but she'd learned long ago that crying meant she didn't get anything else done. Richard didn't like it when things weren't done.

The windows had to be covered again. Broken furniture had to be cleaned up. Shattered glass had to be picked up, and Alison would have to buy a new scotch glass. She couldn't afford a new VCR, but she hoped Richard wouldn't notice that it was missing. She worked with lists. Lists meant things didn't get missed. It was when things got missed that Richard got upset. It was half-past three in the afternoon on Tuesday. Bobby would be playing football for another hour. If she left before four, she could go to the store and buy another glass. Bobby always came home bleeding after fighting one of the boys during the game. She could pick up Band-Aids as her excuse for being out if anyone asked. That gave her half an hour to clean, and then Bobby could help her when he got home.

\* \* \*

Bobby hid the dustpan behind his back when Richard walked into the kitchen. Alison stood like a deer in headlights. She'd forgotten to turn off the computer. She prayed he wouldn't notice, that he couldn't smell her fear.

"How was your day?" Richard asked.

"Good." Alison said.

"Where's my newspaper?"

A pause. A lonely scotch glass stood on the table.

"Where's my newspaper?" Richard repeated.

"It's in the car. I'll go and get it."

"Why isn't it on the table?" Richard looked unconvinced.

"I was distracted." Alison fumbled. Her voice was shaky.

"By what?" Richard's voice was a little raspy. Alison ran down a mental list of what was coming.

"We were robbed."

Another pause. Richard looked down and closed his eyes. His fists clenched, which meant that Alison had about 15 seconds. Richard spoke gently. "Tell Bobby to go to his room."

Bobby's round face and blue eyes — one black — protested as Alison ordered him away.

The storm broke. Alison shut out the pain as she did every time. It would all be over soon.

\* \* \*

Alison winced as the cotton ball touched the sores on her neck and the antiseptic mingled with her wounds. A few splatters still showed on her face, even after washing. She didn't turn when she heard footsteps behind her on the bathroom floor. She just stared into the mirror, not at Richard, but at herself.

"Alison," The hint of guilt in his voice seemed less convincing than it did other times, "I don't want any more incidents. I bought a gun. I'm going to lock it in the cabinet. Don't tell Bobby."

Alison didn't respond.

"Do you understand?"

She still didn't respond. Richard's face flicked with anger for a second, but then he simply finished. "I don't want you feeling threatened. If you hear anything or feel like something's wrong, use it. Understand?"

Alison nodded faintly. As Richard left, her face clenched and she began to cry despite her effort not to. It would all be over soon.

\* \* \*

**To:** hunter.list@hunter-net.org

**From:** rabbitkeeper377

**Subject:** Help

I just killed my husband. A monster. I need to know how to hide the body. I think the police are coming.

## THE REVELATION

I only got on the internet when Richard became really abusive. He wasn't at first. He was just kind of scared and distant. He asked me to hold him all the time then, but he would never talk.

I guess that's why it took me so long to realize things weren't going to get any better. It looked like no matter what happened that night, everything was going to be all right. I guess I didn't want to deal with the truth.

Then he started getting worse, demanding that everything be a certain way, like nothing should change ever again. When he replaced the mirror that broke that night, he made sure it was exactly the same as the old one. He had to order overseas to get it.

That meant I wasn't going to be going out much or talking to anyone. Too much chance of me talking or maybe making new friends without him. The idea of having friends, living a lie and painting a smile on my face wasn't very appealing, anyway.

So I asked Bobby to show me how to use the internet. He showed me how to use a web browser, so I asked him to show me some web sites he went to. He got embarrassed and took me to a few, but I think he was avoiding some. It wasn't until I really learned what I was doing that I found his bookmarks. They were violent. One had cartoons of rape. I didn't confront him about it.

I found this site when I was figuring out how to work the computer. I don't know how I got here, but I was glad I did. Bobby

was away at school, so I never told him what I found. I just started lurking on the list and reading the old letters. I made sure to hide it all from Richard, of course, and there were times when I just couldn't read any more. People like Teacher195 made some sense, but when I read something like Riggar or Solomon, I had to turn the computer off. They were just so hateful. I couldn't imagine what they'd do to Richard.

Or maybe I wanted them to.

Since Richard's been gone, I've been thinking a lot about the night the woman broke in. I don't remember it well, but there are a few things. Bobby got a lot of stitches. And for just a second, I remember seeing Richard and that woman look like one another. Like they were dead. I still can't get past that thought.

So even though some people on here seem insane, I'm starting to take some of what they say seriously, even the things about "messengers." Spirit Guide tells me that the messengers are just a force of nature, not really a thinking person. I have no idea what's true.

Crusader says God has chosen people to see evil. I don't know that I see anything, not any more, anyway. Does that mean God has forsaken me? Or was I damned from the start and that's why all this has happened?

Or maybe I was right before, when everything seemed so unclear. I managed to sleep a little each night, before Richard would climb into bed with me. He sometimes lay down with me before sunrise, when he was going to bed. I always woke up to his cold skin. That's when I had a chance to think sometimes. I'd go back to that night.

Bobby was laying there, unconscious. I was tied up, screaming but no one heard me so far down at the end of the block. Then she threw the door open and dropped Richard to the floor. She kicked him and yelled at him. He was dead, but somehow not. He didn't look right, but I knew it was still him. He was still the man I fell in love with. I couldn't bring myself to stop him.

I wouldn't.

## A FLEETING MOMENT

I swear to God, they wrecked my life. They lured me in, used me, and drove me across six states in just over a month. Oregon all the way to Texas. The only reason I'm still here is because I can't go any further south without a passport, and I don't have time to get one. I know I don't have the time. They're coming. They won't let me go any further. I figure I have maybe a week. So far I've managed to dodge the things, but this time I'm cornered.

I guess I've made every mistake you can. I've learned from them all, but it doesn't make any difference. These things have more moves than I could ever learn.

The first one they use on you is a lure. If you don't know what to look for, you'll bite. It starts by confusing you. You still hear background noises, but they're all muffled. Everything they don't want

you to pay attention to gets foggy. You start focusing on the things they want you to. Then they show themselves. It's fucking smart, because you have just enough sense to shit your pants, and you can't think straight. So you're almost guaranteed to follow along when they tell you what to do, like "UNDO THE WRONG." They might use different words, I don't know. They only tried it on me once. It worked.

I panicked. I couldn't think of anything to do except get the hell out of there. But you might not be able to run because you can't find the door. Your only option is, go along with it all and at that moment you're so wired, if you don't do something, it feels like you'll explode.

If you're reading this, take my advice: Don't play along! Find the door and get the hell out, even if you can't see the way! If you stay, you may never be able to look back. They infect you, turn you inside out and put things in your head. You'll be able to see them, but only for a second. And then, you can't see them any more. They can see you good enough, though.

### VOICES

"This tape is a record of the testimony of Lawrence Allen Parker, residing at 1405 Crestwick Street, taken on Thursday, February 13th at 4:15 PM, 53rd Precinct. Present as witnesses are Detective Mark DiTollo, badge number 4075, and Dr. Susan Adams, state-appointed psychiatrist. Mr. Parker has indicated that he waives all right to legal counsel and wishes to make a full confession. Sir, is this correct?"

"Yes. I don't want this whole thing dragged through a courtroom. The lawyers would distort everything. I just want to get my story out. The press is going to get copies of this, right?"

"That's between you and the District Attorney, Mr. Parker. Right now, I want you to concentrate on your testimony. Tell us, in your own words, what happened on the night of the eighth."

"Wait. That won't work. I need to go further back than that. This all started back in December, a couple weeks before Christmas. That's when I first saw the guy."

"All right. Start from the beginning."

"Okay. My, uh... my daughter Natalie, she just turned sixteen back in October. She'd been having problems at school, and at home, too. She was always pissed off about something. When she wasn't screaming at her mother, she was locked in her room. Andrea... my wife... didn't think it was anything major, just being a teenager, you know?"

"Go on."

"Well, anyway, she had her learner's permit, and she started staying out after school. On the weekends, she wouldn't come back until two or three in the morning sometimes. I'd give her hell the next day, but she just didn't give a damn. And if we grounded her on the weekends she just stayed out during the week. Her grades went into the crapper when she used to be an honor student. My wife was really disturbed by that."

"The final straw was the night we were all supposed to go across town to my parent's house for an early Christmas dinner. Natalie never came home. So, after midnight, once my wife had pretty much cried herself to sleep, I got in my truck and went looking for her."

"Were you angry, Mr. Parker?"

"What the hell kind of question is that? Of course I was angry. God only knew what she was doing at that time of night. I told myself if I caught her with a boy I was going to knock his head in. I must've driven around for an hour and a half when I just got a hunch I should head over to Weston Park and look there. There'd been that thing in the paper about all the punks that hung out down there after dark. Something told me I might find her there. Sure enough, there was her car, parked in plain sight."

"What happened then?"

"I just lost it. That's all there was to it. I could see maybe a half-dozen people standing under a lamppost in the middle of the park. I got out of the truck and headed their way."

"What did you plan to do?"

"Just get Natalie and take her home. Looking back, I can't believe I even had the nerve to do something like that. For all I knew, those people could have been drug dealers or worse. But I was too mad to really think about it at the time. It was a weird night."

"I remember how dark it was. The only light came from the lamppost. The closer I got to those people, the more my chest started to tighten up. There was this... I don't know... this anticipation building inside me. You ever felt that before? Like you're on the verge of something that's going to change your life? I felt it then."

### INSIGHT OR INSANITY

Monsters are real. You may not be able to see them. Or maybe you get to see them once, just enough to learn what's really out there and leave you wondering where others might be. My husband was turned into a thing. I don't know what I loved him and needed him, and he was turned

into a creature that fed on the blood of animals. What else can you call that?

Have they always been with us? Things, creatures, demons? The Bible says so. Shakespeare and even old Greek stories talk about ghosts like they're real. Old people know better than us then? Did they know the truth we've forgotten, or are we just blind to it now?

But maybe the others have always been here, too. Like you who're on the Internet. You wouldn't have always been online, but you could have always been here. Maybe the ancient people who told stories about monsters could see the things like you do – and like I did. Maybe they told those stories to warn people and help save them. If that's true, why can't we all see the things today? We still know the stories, so why don't we all know what's really out there? Why can't I even remember everything that happened to me that night?

Am I crazy?

### FUMBLING

*It was when I got into San Antonio that I finally decided I needed to know more about these things. I mean, I'd been running for days, barely sleeping or eating. I didn't even know what I was running from, except that I knew they were after me, where I couldn't see. I didn't know what to do. I didn't have time to read. I never knew how to use those library computer things anyway. Then I thought maybe other stories might be able to tell me something, like in horror movies. My shit-ass hotel had one of those bolted down VCRs in it, so I rented stuff that looked good. There was a bunch of movies with vampires and mummies and shit. I didn't know which ones to get, so I just grabbed a bunch.*

*Fuck if it did me any good. They say you can stab vampires in the chest with wood and it kills 'em. Sunlight burns them. I've been running day and night, and I know they're still after me, so that daylight thing seems like bullshit. They can't see themselves in mirrors, whatever good that is. And you have to invite them into your house. Does that count for your hotel room or your truck?*

The one thing that I did notice is that these things make each other or make deals to make each other, like dealing with the Devil. Hell? Is that where they come from? Is that where they go? Is that where they want to take me? Have I really died and the Devil wants me? What made me such a bad person?

### AWAKE

"The punks never saw me coming. They were all teenagers, except for this one guy. He was



tall and pale and really thin. I figured him for some kind of drug addict or something. He wore a black leather jacket. They all hung on his every word, like he was some kind of salesman or something. Natalie was standing right beside him. The look in her eyes made me sick."

"What was that? How did she look?"

"Like she loved him. I'd never seen her look that way before. And right at that instant, as I looked at her, I swear heard someone say something like, 'She worships him.'"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know. Haven't you ever been in a situation and you just kind of realize something that you didn't understand before? What do they call that?"

"Intuition."

"Right. That's what I think it was. This guy had her in the palm of his hand. So I took a look at him, and Jesus . . ."

"What did you see?"

"His skin was too white, more like stone. That's when he noticed me and smiled. And I saw his teeth."

"Teeth?"

"He had fangs, like a dog. Like he was an animal."

"An animal?"

"You don't believe me? Go down to the morgue and have a look for yourself."

"Let's stick to your testimony. You looked at this man and thought he was some kind of animal. What did you do then?"

"I damn near had a heart attack. All I could think about was how my daughter was so wrapped up in this thing, and I had to do something. But what? There were six of them, and I'm not young any more. Then, just as quick, the guy looked normal again, or at least as normal as someone like him could. It was like I'd taken him by surprise, caught him with his guard down, just for a second."

"Are you saying he could make himself look different?"

"I know what it sounds like, but yeah, I guess. You could still tell, though, once you knew what to look for. And his eyes. They were all black and dead."

"But he looked normal to everyone else there?"

"I suppose. They sure didn't seem to notice what was wrong with him. I've been wondering since: What if there are more guys like that, but we all overlook them or just don't want to see them. Maybe I was so mad that I could see him for what he was."

## KNOW OURSELVES

Every day I get on here, I get off a little sooner. I don't understand what's going on in the world, but I can tell that fighting about it doesn't solve anything.

In the old letters, that Mojo guy posted about how monsters are people the CIA and the government wants killed. That set off an argument that ended in people insulting each other. Okay, what Mojo said is pretty wild, but is it any wilder than a woman breaking into your home and turning your husband into something he never was before — and leaving you to live with it?

When I read some of Builder 50's old posts, everyone seemed to gobble them up like it was the gospel truth. He talked about criminals being full of creatures that pull the strings of the police, business and the governments. How is that any different from what Mojo said?

Why split hairs? Why fight amongst yourselves instead of agreeing to do something about these things? Why not find out what they are, what we are and why we know things? Hell, why not find out why most of you talk about doing amazing things that you can't explain? There's lots I can't explain, but I know I can't perform miracles. So why do I know the truth? Why not try to understand what's going on instead of attacking each other?

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

I miss my mother and father, even Emily, my baby sister. Christ, I never thought I'd say that. Emily was a pain in the ass. After she was born, she started crying every day at the butt crack of dawn. Our house had walls like paper. I'd come home from the night shift and try to sleep, and she'd wake me up in no time. Maybe there are just too many years between us for me to understand. I don't know how my folks put up with her at their age.

But I miss her now. I wonder what she'll grow up to look like. Probably ugly as me, but you know, you always make everyone better in your head.

I wrote a letter to the whole family, between these pages.

Dear Mom, Dad and Emily,

I wanted you to know that I'm alive. I can't say where, but there are things I want to say to you.

I haven't been watching the news, but I'm guessing they reported a murder at the Noatel office. About when I went missing. Maybe they're even saying I did it. I want to tell you I didn't. I might have stopped it happening, I suppose. But I didn't. It was too much for me to deal with.

I've been running since then. I couldn't go to the police. The police couldn't catch the people who did it. But they saw me. They knew I'd seen what they'd done. That's why I ran. If I came home, I can't

say what would have happened. I didn't want anything to happen to you. You have to trust me that this is the only way.

I miss you all, but this is for the best. Please don't be angry at me for leaving.

Love,  
Steve

I guess I realized I'd never send it about halfway through, but it just seemed like I needed to finish anyway. With everything that's happened, maybe I just needed to remind myself that everything was normal not long ago. That I was normal not long ago.

### UNDERSTANDING

"We're not here to discuss theories, Mr. Parker. Tell us what happened after this man noticed you? What did he do?"

"Well, that was the really creepy part. He seemed to think it was kind of funny, and that really pissed me off. Natalie made some smart-ass comment to me. I grabbed her by the arm and told her she was coming home. All the others thought it was hilarious. I wasn't going to get into an argument with Natalie in front of those punks, so I started dragging her back to the truck."

"And?"

"The guy just looked at me and said, 'No.' Like it was the word of God or something. Maybe that's why everyone seemed to cling to him. The scary thing was, I felt like I wanted to stop, like I should listen to him, too."

"Did you?"

"Would I be sitting here if I did? It was like he was trying to make me one of them, like what he'd done to Natalie, whatever that was. God only knows what they would have done to me later. But it didn't work. I got in the guy's face and told him if he ever came near my daughter again there'd be hell to pay. Then it was his turn to look scared. I don't think anyone had ever stood up to him like that. Even the kids were shocked. That's how I left them, dragging Natalie the whole way. We drove home, and I didn't stop yelling at her until we pulled into the garage."

"And this was Wednesday? That would have been the 15th, right?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Someone was murdered in the park early the next morning."

"Yeah, I read about that in the paper. I thought, what if that had been Natalie. What if I didn't get a feeling to look for her there? She might be dead now."

### FIGHTING BLIND

I stayed inside today. Called in sick to the shitty job I got. There's something outside my door. It creaks along the floorboards. I hear every step in the flophouse squeak as something climbs them, invisible. Last night, I threw open my door and ran outside to catch it. There was nothing, but suddenly I get this massive head rush and nearly went over the railing. I freaked out and ran back inside did something I haven't done since I was a kid. I dove into bed and pulled the covers over my head.

They've found me again.

### FALLOUT

For me, there were two morning afters. There was the morning after Richard died, and there was the morning after Richard died again.

I don't remember the first one. Not very well, anyway. I think Richard had a hand in it. I'm almost certain he was finding ways to make me forget. Doing things to distract me. I only get flashes of what happened.

What I do remember is the weeks that followed. I threw myself into the house. There was always something that needed to be cleaned. Cleaning was very important, since cooking took less time. But there was still shopping. Long drives. Mindless music. Diversions. I guess that's how I got by. It was that or kill myself. But when Richard brought the gun home, I realized that killing myself was actually my second choice. I emptied the gun when I shot him. I just kept pulling the trigger until nothing more happened. He didn't fall right away. It wasn't so much that he died as he just stopped moving.

Then came the second morning after. Thinking about the look in his eyes after the first shot, just before whatever was left of my husband left him and was replaced by something hideous. That look of betrayal. He couldn't believe his wife had turned on him.

I think he loved me once. I know I loved him. So I kept up the cleaning, starting with his body. One of you told me what to do. I sprayed him with room deodorizer and wrapped him in garbage bags so he wouldn't attract flies when the police came. I dragged him out to the big trash bin outside. He was just alive a few minutes ago, but sure enough, there was a smell right away, like he'd really been dead for months.

I was lucky the police never came, even after the shooting. I spent a week expecting them. I guess no one ever heard. Our house is on old pasture land. The nearest neighbor is at the back of the property. But still, they should have heard something. Why didn't they report it? Maybe they weren't home.

Later, when Bobby was at school, I buried Richard in the pasture. I was filthy.

After a while, it didn't seem too important to clean anymore. Who was I doing it for? I started calling up old friends, instead. People I hadn't seen or talked to in months. I couldn't tell them

anything, but I needed to talk. They wanted to know what happened. I told them Richard and I were fighting and he finally left me. That was true, in a way.

I've been doing things with them again to keep from thinking. But I also turn to them to remind myself that I'm alive. I'm a good person. If they want to spend time with me, I can't be all bad. I didn't ask for any of this.

I think I've seen every movie that's playing. I'm even thinking of going back to church.

## DO UNTO OTHERS

"Mr. Parker, according to your testimony nearly two months passed between your first encounter with the victims and the time of the attack in question. What happened in the meantime?"

"After Natalie and I got home that night, I don't think I slept a wink. All I could think about was the look on that guy's face. My daughter didn't seem to have a clue what he might be up to. All she could talk about was how happy he made her feel. That she hated me."

"Did you tell your wife?"

"No. I had a hard enough time dealing with it myself. Andrea didn't need that kind of stress on top of everything else. I just told her Natalie had been out at a nightclub somewhere and left it at that. Then I told my daughter she had to come straight home after school every day and turn her keys over to me. If she didn't, I'd call the police and tell them she'd stolen the car. I hoped that maybe if I grounded her long enough the whole thing would blow over. Believe me, I never wanted to see that guy or anyone like him ever again."

"But it didn't work."

"No. She'd come home and throw the keys on the kitchen table, then turn right around and walk out the door. Friends would pick her up or she would walk three or four blocks and catch the bus. I yelled at her every night, but it didn't do any good. She was a teenager, for God's sake. What could I do? Lock her in the basement?"

"You could have called us, Mr. Parker. That's what we're here for."

"Oh, that's bullshit. You think I didn't try that? She wasn't doing anything illegal. Every cop I talked to just shrugged his shoulders. And if anyone tried to look into that guy at the park, I never heard about it."

"All, right. Let's move on."

"All this went on for two weeks. It made my wife so miserable I told Natalie she was staying home for New Years, no matter what. She laughed in my face. She said she belonged to someone else now, and one day she would stand over my grave. I admit, I

hit her. One of her earrings flew across the room. She picked it up without a word and walked out the door. I couldn't stop shaking for hours. But the more I sat and thought about it, the more I understood it wasn't her talking. Those were his words coming out of her mouth. Like she was in a cult or something. That's when I decided that he had to be stopped. One way or another."

## LIMITS

scotch  
six pack  
bread  
peanut butter  
toilet paper  
matches

I've got to get out of here. How can I get over the border without a passport? I thought I saw a documentary on it once. You go over a river or something. Put all your stuff in garbage bags and float it over.

But I don't even know where the river is. And even if I did, I don't have my jeep anymore. It broke down on the side of the highway. I swear it was running fine and then it was just dead. I got a chill down my spine, but there was nothing there. I tried to keep myself calm and start walking into town.

I know there are things out there. I've seen them. But can they stay hidden when they don't want to be seen? Are they even there when they know you're looking? Did they leave me stranded at the side of the road?

A guy pulled over and offered me a ride. I told him to fuck off.

## EXHAUSTION

I decided to straighten up Bobby's room yesterday. I couldn't find anyone to talk to. He hates me going in there, but everything else was clean, and I couldn't keep my mind off things. It didn't help.

Before all this started, Richard bought Bobby a guitar. He used to practice a lot and could have been in the school band. They said he needed more practice. Since then, I thought he was practicing, but now I know the truth. He's been playing so loud now that Richard is gone, I've never really heard the words. I didn't even know he was singing.

I found a piece of paper on his desk. These are the only words I feel I can type here.

And now that dagger tempts me  
Now the life resents me  
To take the living from the boy  
To end the game my heart the toy  
But my eyes saw and bled and more  
And though the thought I can adore

He will never beat me  
I will give no more  
Would you suffer their rejection  
To end the pure perfection?

Before this all happened, Bobby was one of the happiest kids you'd ever meet. He had typical problems for a boy his age. He did well in school, except for math maybe. He had a lot of friends. Now, he gets into fights every day. He comes home bleeding.

I just don't know what to do.

## STALKING

"You felt like you were backed into a corner."

"Exactly. I'm not a violent guy. I didn't want any part of it. If it were up to me, I'd have been happy to forget the whole thing. But this guy was after my daughter. I didn't really have a choice."

"So you made a conscious decision to kill him."

"Uh, I yes. I used to hunt. I looked at it like I was going after a dangerous animal, like a cougar or a bear. I wasn't about to go back into that park with a baseball bat or something. I started by trying to learn who the guy was and what he was up to."

"How did you do that?"

"I watched the park. Every night after Natalie left, I took the bus downtown, then walked to the park. There are all kinds of places around there where you can sit and watch without being noticed. It wasn't like the guy was careful or anything. He'd show up like clockwork, every night, hanging around like a king. It was easier than I thought. It was like he wasn't afraid of anyone. I even got a camcorder and made some tapes. They're at home if you want to see them."

"What did you learn?"

"That he was really fast when he wanted to be, and strong. I once saw him pick this other punk off the ground like he was a rag doll. I figured he was a lot tougher than he looked, too."

"Go on."

"After a week or two, I started to come up with a plan. I went to a gun show in January and bought a rifle with a night sight from a deer hunter. I also found a manual that told me how to make dum-dum bullets. I figured that no matter how tough the guy was, he couldn't do anything with his head blown off."

"Who'd you buy the rifle from?"

"I forgot."

"All right, we can come back to that later. What happened next?"

"On the weekends, I went out into the country to practice shooting. During the week, I kept

watching the guy and figuring out the best place to get a good shot. By the end of January, things were getting really bad at home. Natalie stopped eating and was getting really pale, but I couldn't see a single mark on her. I don't know what the hell he was doing to her, but I had this feeling that if I didn't do something soon, it was going to be too late."

"But it took you nearly two more weeks to do anything. Why?"

"Do I look like a killer? I tried twice before I actually got the guts to go through with it. I had the guy in my sights, but I couldn't pull the trigger. Despite everything that happened, I had second thoughts. What if I was wrong? What if everything I'd seen had just been a trick or I imagined it? I wrestled with a whole bunch of doubts until last Tuesday, when Natalie said she was moving out."

"Where was she going?"

"I have no idea. All she said was that she couldn't live with a bunch of 'cattle' anymore. She actually said that. Does that give you any idea how far gone she was? My wife went to pieces. She begged and pleaded. Natalie just laughed. Then, just as she was walking out the door, she looked at me and winked, and said she'd be home for the holidays. The look in her eyes scared me to death. There was almost nothing left of her. She was just one step away from becoming like that son of a bitch. That's when I knew."

## IMPROVISATION

I realized last night after the creaking on the steps stopped, that if whatever was outside came for me, I'd have no way out of this hole. The door would be blocked. I tried the window and it was painted shut, so I broke the glass and hung a blanket across it. The cold is getting in now, but it's better than getting killed. I'm on the second floor. I think I can jump if I have to.

I could hear the guy next door and his skanky girlfriend arguing this morning. They were doing a bunch of shouting. I heard him say something like "Why don't I shoot you right now?" Then she screamed, and I heard the door slam. I looked out the peephole and saw her run down the creaky stairs. He's always leaving his door open like he's too tough to care who might be around, or he's daring someone to make trouble. I even see him leave the building and his door is open. The next time he leaves, I'm going to see if he has a gun. I'm going to take it.

## PROACTION

I woke up screaming last night. At least, I think I was screaming. Richard came to me. He was decayed. His suit was filthy. A trash bag was still wrapped around his waist. I couldn't sleep after that, but I couldn't leave the bed, either. Finally, in the morning, after Bobby left for school, I went into the pasture where I buried Richard. The ground was hard. There was no sign of trouble. I had dreamed the whole thing. Still, I knew that we had to move.

I can't bear to live here any longer.

## CONSEQUENCES

"I got to the park a little before midnight. I drove the truck that night again, parking it at the spot I'd picked out weeks before. I rolled down the passenger window and got the rifle ready. The guy was about 50 yards away, standing under the lamppost like always. He had a small crowd of people standing around, maybe eight or so, but I figured they'd run once the shooting started. Natalie wasn't there. She usually showed up right at 12. I wanted to get it over with before she got there.

"It was just like sighting in on a buck. I put the crosshairs right between the bastard's eyes and squeezed the trigger. Took most of his head clean off."

"But then you started shooting the others."

"I didn't want to. Like I said, I expected them to run, and some of them did. But four of them grabbed the guy's body and started to drag him off. That's when I realized he was still alive. So I shot them. They never stopped trying to drag him away. One of them would fall, but the rest wouldn't even look back. They just kept moving, like robots.

"Once the last one dropped, I put the truck in gear and drove across the park to make sure the guy was finished off. I couldn't believe he was still alive, still struggling. I went and got the tire iron from under the bed and finished it. It was the most horrible thing I've ever done."

"And that's when you saw your daughter."

"Yeah."

## FLAILING

I have a gun now. And a plan. I'm waiting to hear the creaking on the stairs and I'm going to shoot whatever's making that noise. I may not be able to see it, but I can hear it and I know it's there. I keep looking out the peep hole, just to be sure. Any time now.

## DIRECTION

This is harder than I expected. I walked into the first real-estate office I could think of and just said, "I want to sell my house." Then came all the paper work, and questions about price and getting people to look at it and give it a quote. I told them I didn't need anyone to look at it. I wanted to leave right away, because my mother was sick across the country and I was moving to be with her. I wanted to sell quickly.

I haven't done anything more with Richard. I don't intend to. If anyone ever finds him, Bobby and I will be long gone and that will be it. I refuse to think about it any more.

But all this leaves Bobby and I with nowhere to live. My mother really died four years ago, and my father died two years before that. I don't have enough money to afford an apartment or motel room for long. That leaves only one option I can think of.

My mother-in-law, Sarah.

How do you ask someone for a place to stay after you killed her son?

## RELATING TO PEOPLE

I'm not in that shitty hotel anymore. I bailed, and I'm not alone anymore, either. I mean, I met someone else who's seen.

I waited a couple days to hear the creaking again. Plenty of people came and went, but they were real, not what I was waiting for. I looked every time I heard someone. This time it was some old guy near the top of the stairs. He was sick or something. He was clinging to the railing and was white as a sheet and sweating. At first I was going to blow it off, but when I heard the stairs creak and he hadn't moved, I knew that thing was out there doing something to him. It was making him sick.

I guess I forgot about the gun all of a sudden. I forgot all my plans. All I wanted to do was get the guy away from there. I could just tell that he'd seen it. That he knew. That was all that mattered.

I ran out and dragged him down the stairs as fast as I could. He couldn't speak. He just gasped for air; I yelled at him, "You saw it didn't you? You saw it!" He looked at me crazy eyed, like that was the last thing he expected to hear. "Where's your car?" I yelled. He pointed down the street and we ran over to it - a big Lincoln, like a grandfather would drive. "Give me the keys," I said. Maybe he thought I was taking him to the hospital or something. In that moment, all I wanted to do was get out of there and stop being alone. Maybe I did want to help him.



"Where do you live," I yelled as we pulled away from the curb. He was so freaked he told me.

### RECOGNITION

After Bobby was born, I noticed that I had trouble talking to people who didn't have children. It wasn't biological or anything. I guess I had new responsibilities and I was interested in and knew things my single friends didn't. Everything in my life had changed around Bobby. I had to reconsider everything I knew. Other parents understood, but single people didn't.

Going through what I did with Richard, learning that there are things I don't understand in the world, is almost exactly the same as having a child. It's painful at first, because your world as you know it changes. But once you get your mind around it, you can't see things the same way again. Which is why it's ironic that Bobby now means more to me than he ever has, even though I thought it would never be possible to say that. Despite the troubles he's having, that we're having, he's the only one who's been through all this with me. He understands what it's like. When I break down crying in the car and have to pull over, he's the one who tells me it'll be okay. That means so much.

I don't pretend to understand or agree with everything I read on hunter-net. There are some pretty angry, judgmental people here. Some of you seem to sympathize with each other the way Bobby and I do. I get the feeling that we would see eye to eye if we met. But there are others who are just bitter and violent. I can't imagine Rigger trying to understand me. I've only seen what I've seen. I don't know much more about what you all write about. From what I've seen, someone like Rigger would just yell at me and call me a loser, like I'm not a person. I don't understand how any of us can treat each other like that. I mean, how could I just lash out at Bobby? We all need each other. Who else can understand?

### FACES IN THE CROWD

"I don't know if Natalie had been there the whole time, or if she'd just arrived as I was hitting the guy. I heard a scream, and when I looked up, there she was. She had a look on her face that I'll never forget. Fear. Hatred. Of me. She called me a monster. Can you believe that? Here I'd thrown my whole life away for her, and she hated me. I tried to talk to her, to explain why, but she ran to her car and drove away. There wasn't anything else to do but get in the truck and get out of there. I went home and cleaned up, and buried the rifle in the backyard. After a couple of days, I even started to hope I'd gotten away with it, until this morning when you showed up at my door."

"You know how we found you, don't you?"

"Natalie turned me in."

"That's right. Doesn't that tell you something, Mr. Parker?"

"What? That I'm some kind of psycho? Haven't you been listening to a single word I've said? The things I killed weren't people anymore. I don't know what they'd become, but they weren't right. Look at the bodies if you don't believe me!"

"Mr. Parker, doesn't it seem a little strange that if the things you're talking about really exist, more people wouldn't be trying to do something about them?"

"How do you know there aren't?"

"Excuse me?"

"When I was at that gun show, there was this guy talking to one of the dealers. He was kind of wild looking, and he was kind of nervous. He never stood with his back to the door, and he flinched every time someone in the crowd brushed against him. My first thought was that he was a wacko, but then I saw his eyes. He wasn't crazy. He was scared. Terrified out of his mind. He'd seen the truth, too, same as I had."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I don't know. When you walk into a bar, can you tell if someone's a cop just by looking at them?"

"Sure."

"There you go. It's like I don't know. Like you can tell they've been through the same shit you have. It really set me back. By the time I got my act together and made my way through the crowd, the guy was gone. I spent the rest of the day hanging around the show, looking to see if I could spot anybody else, but no luck."

"What would you have done if you found him?"

"I'd talk to him. Ask him everything I've been wondering since December. What had he seen? Had he managed to kill any of the things? How many are out there? I guess try to prove that I wasn't losing my mind."

### COMMISERATION

The old guy's name is George. He's a vet. I started trying to explain what I've seen, what he saw at the hotel, but he didn't take it real well. It's all too much, too fast for him. I guess it was for me at first, too. Maybe it still is. Still, he hasn't kicked me out yet. It's almost like he's trying to make sense of what he saw and he's more afraid of never knowing than he is of a complete stranger in his house. I'm kind of walking on eggshells here. I've got nowhere to go.

I told him what I saw, that this demon killed a man where I worked. I told him how I'd been running all the way from Portland, and that the things were after me. They had to be or why else was there

one outside my door at the hotel. I sort of realized then that I'd probably said too much. I realized he could blame me for what happened to him and that now I'd made him a target, too. Instead of getting mad, he laughed in a forced, weird way. I've tried to cover up my feelings that way, too.

He told me his grandkids are supposed to get here the day after tomorrow. They'd planned a visit for a while. Great timing. I haven't pushed it. I'm waiting for George to kick me out and run me off so he can pretend nothing ever happened, so he can get back to normal with his family. But part of him seems to be holding out. He starts to say something to me, then he stops like he hasn't decided. Pretty soon I figure being a grandfather is going to kick in, and that'll be it for me.

I think his biggest problem is he's just a lonely old guy. He went way out of his neighborhood to see an old army buddy staying at my hotel. He never even saw him on account of what happened. It's like I'm a stand-in for company until the grandkids get here.

I know what he's going through. He's alone in a big old house. I'm alone and I've got nothing. We've both lost everyone. Either we're both pathetic, we're both lying to ourselves, or we just want to get away from what's real for a little while.

I don't think I want to be around when the kids get here. Sure, I'll get the boot, but I don't want to be here to see the look on George's face when he sees them and still can't ignore what he knows.

### RECRIMINATION

Sarah is a wonderful woman. She's not taking the news of her son's death well, of course. I thought about lying to her, telling her that Richard left me or ran off with another woman, but then how would I explain that I just up and sold the house without his input? Or without telling her where he'd gone.

I'm learning how many lies you have to tell when you've been through something no one else can understand. You have to plan them out in advance. Lying to sell the house was one thing. No one was hurt. Lying to Sarah is something else altogether. This is about her son. She's a living, breathing person. I told her it was a car accident. That he didn't want a funeral in his will, and that we had never gotten life insurance so there was nothing to collect and help out now. At first, she didn't understand why I hadn't told her sooner, but she seemed to accept that I wanted to tell her face to face, not over the phone. I think it helped that she's pretty old and her husband took care of all those kinds of things when he was alive. She didn't have a good sense for what kinds of arrangements have to be made when someone dies. I feel sorry for her.

I thought lying to her would be the hardest part, but it's not. The hardest part is that she believes me and just bursts into tears once in a while, crying on my shoulder. The whole while I'm thinking, "I killed your son."

Sarah is doing her best to make us comfortable. She's so vulnerable. Anyone could take advantage of her right now. Like me. That's why I've decided to keep her life as normal as possible. I've already destroyed so much of it. It's all I can do to protect the rest.

I read Sarah's Bible tonight. Psalms 5:11, "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them." I'm taking refuge in her house. Does God want me to protect her? I guess not. That psalm is about protecting each other from people who lie.

### THICK AND THIN

"Have you seen any others like yourself since then?"

"No. But that doesn't mean they aren't out there. Hopefully when this whole mess hits the papers, they'll realize they aren't alone, and they'll start trying to find each other."

"What you're talking about is vigilantism."

"No, I'm talking about survival. Somebody to watch your back when you're trying to stop something. Someone to offer ideas and weapons that actually work. But mostly someone I could talk to who wouldn't think I was crazy."

"If they're willing to help, Mr. Parker, odds are they've committed some serious crimes themselves."

"I wouldn't care if they were Martians. I'd take any help I could get. We're talking about saving people from things a hell of a lot worse than muggers or rapists. Who in their right mind would let prejudice get in the way of that? Do you let your beliefs get in the way of saving someone's life?"

"It's not that simple, and you know it. Just for the sake of argument, let's say that the man you killed in the park was really something else. What about the four other people you shot?"

"I told you, they weren't right anymore, either."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"They did what he told them to. He changed them somehow."

"Then what were they? Aliens? Bogeymen?"

"I don't know."

"Then you have to admit that you shot four people who committed no other crime than being in the wrong damn place at the wrong damn time."

"They were helping him."

"Well, no shit. If someone takes a shot at me, I hope there's people around to try and save my ass, too. You can't sit there and tell me you didn't kill

people. You looked at them through a scope, for God's sake. And now you're talking about getting together anybody who's willing to believe you, and encouraging them to do the same?"

"That's not what I'm saying at all! I'm not talking about lynch mobs. Hell, maybe if people got a little more organized it would actually cut down on crime and other things. Ever think of that? They could watch over each other. If you ask me, that's a hell of a lot better than a bunch of desperate, scared people running loose. You're acting like we're no better than them. Why would someone go out and try to stop these things if not out of responsibility or compassion? You're making me out to be a cold-blooded killer. As far as I'm concerned, I protected my family. I'm not proud of what I did."

"But if you walked out of here today and saw someone else you thought was wrong, you'd try to kill them, too, right?"

"If the thing threatened my wife or my daughter, you better believe it. It's not like I can call the cops."

### LOSSES

I fucked everything up.

George's grandkids came today. I didn't have the balls to leave early, and I felt so bad when they arrived that I went for a walk. I didn't want to make George have to explain me to his daughter and her husband, so I went out the back. I think I heard him say something about putting up his army buddy's son, but I didn't stick around to back the story up.

I had the gun on me. I always have it. Somehow it didn't seem right to leave it in the house with the kids there. How would I feel if someone had one in the house with Emily?

I walked around the block. It was one of those neighborhoods that was probably quiet when houses were first built, but things had grown up around it, and the streets were busy with traffic and people who went too fast. I didn't go far, but after dark, by myself again, the fear came back. Every shadow seemed to hide something. I started to panic, wondering where I would go, if I didn't go back to George's. I couldn't stand the idea of being completely by myself again, with no car and almost no money left.

I guess I wasn't even paying attention when it came out of nowhere at me, making all kinds of racket. I was standing across the street from George's house

when the neighbor's damn dog came running out, barking at me. I wasn't expecting it. I didn't even think. All I saw was a thing killing a man all over again. I suppose that's when I pulled the gun and started shooting. I think I hit the dog. It yelped and ran away.

But that's not the bad part. The bad bit is that George must have heard the shots. He must have acted pretty fast for an old guy. He came running out to see what happened. He came straight at me, yelling my name. I just stood there like an idiot. I saw it coming and just watched. He ran right out in front of a truck and went rolling off to the side of the road. The truck skidded to a stop. By now I could hear other people's voices. Neighbors maybe, or George's family. I didn't wait to find out.

I ran over to George. He just lay there, looking up at me. He wasn't moving or blinking. Some guy came out of the truck, screaming.

I must have snapped. It's all a blur, like when you get so mad you do things that you can't even explain later. I jammed the gun in the guy's face and told him to run. His truck door was open. I jumped in and drove off.

I'm parked behind a mall, trying to think my way through it all. It's coming to an end. I can feel it.

## EXILE

Sarah's house is small, and it overlooks the beach up north from where we used to live. It's not big. I'm sleeping on the couch, and Bobby has the spare bedroom. It's a good place for talking, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper, as if I didn't have a care in the world.

I spent about half an hour on the balcony reading the paper today, 15 minutes on the phone, frantic, and the rest of the day huddled in the bedroom. Sarah had gone off with friends after I encouraged her. Bobby waited outside in the living room when I wouldn't answer his knocks.

I was reading the paper when I saw an ad. I didn't think twice about it at first, but then I couldn't take my eyes off a strange symbol in it. It was a cross with a circle at the end of each line. I couldn't take my eyes off it. It didn't mean anything, but it was like it meant everything and I just couldn't understand, like when you forget something and stop thinking about it and just let it come to you.

I've read about symbols here that some of you just understand. Is this one of them? What does it mean? Why can't I understand it? Or do I and I just don't know it?

There was a phone number in the ad. All it says is "Lonely?" like in a personal ad. Does whoever posted the ad understand? Should I call the number?

## REALITIES

"All right, tell me this. Your daughter was under this guy's influence, right? Just like those four people you shot."

"No, that's not "

"Yes it is. Going by your own testimony, she was no different from them. So suppose you walked out of this building right now and discovered a bunch of vigilantes who've found themselves a new victim

only it's not some punk that you don't like. It's your daughter. What then? Do you call the cops? Do you try to talk them out of it? Or do you kill them to protect your kid?

"You son of a bitch "

"Answer the question, Mr. Parker!"

"I don't know, all right? I never claimed to have all the answers. I'm sure I'd try to talk them out of it. But if they believed she was a danger to others, maybe it would be best if she were stopped. I'm not saying I'd like it, but it would be better than seeing her change other people. Frankly, I'd rather count on the judgment of a group than have to make a life-or-death decision on my own. That was the hardest thing I ever did."

"That's why we have laws, Mr. Parker. Something you seem to have forgotten."

## PURPOSES

I think I'm ready to go. I'm going to Mexico, even if I die trying. What other choice do I have? I'm probably wanted for two murders now, or at least one, a carjacking and who knows what else. I got a man killed, and I'm sure the things are still looking for me. If I don't make it over the border, at least I'll be dead and this will all be over.

Once I calmed down, I looked through the truck. I found the guy's wallet on the floor. I guess he wasn't carrying it when he got out. There was over \$100 inside, and his driver's license. I still don't have a passport, but I peeled back the plastic on his license and mine, cut out my picture and put it on his license. It looks kind of hacked together, but I have to hope it'll do. If I decide that crossing the border at a gate won't work, I'll go overland someplace remote. I have to think, police and guards are looking for Mexicans coming to the US, not the other way around. All the same, I've duct-taped the gun inside the wheel well of the truck. I can get it out if I need it.

Why the fuck has all this happened to me? Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming,

Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and now Mexico. What then? Dead? Is there some meaning to all this that I just can't see? Meeting George was the best part of it all, but what did that really mean? He got all fucked up and saw some shit like me, then I got him killed. What did I do to deserve this?

And even if I make it into Mexico, what then? Do I just keep running? If I can cross the border, the things must be able to. Shit, you can't even see them. What would stop them from crossing? What if there are things in Mexico, too? Will they come after me? Do borders matter to them?

What country is south of Mexico? Puerto Rico?

I don't even know how to speak Spanish. What other choice do I have, though? I could kill myself. I've thought of that before, but I just couldn't do it. I could try to tell people what's happening, but they wouldn't believe me. I hardly believe it. Shit, George didn't want to believe, and he saw one of them.

All I know to do is run.

## END OF THE ROAD

"Mr. Parker, I have no further questions for you. Your confession of the murders at Weston Park on the night of February eighth is now a matter of record. At this time, I believe Doctor Adams has a few things she would like to clear up while I finalize your transfer arrangements. He's all yours, Doctor."

"Thank you, Detective. Mr. Parker, in the few minutes we have left, I wanted to revisit some of your statements. During the several weeks prior to your attack, you believed that your daughter was being changed by one of your victims' influence, is that right?"

"He was turning her into a something terrible, like himself."

"And you killed this person based on your belief. What did you hope to do about your daughter afterward? From what you've described, her change seemed extensive."

"I hoped that once the guy was dead, she might come around. Like once he was gone, she'd turn back to normal. I don't know, maybe I was naive. I'm her father. She needed me, whether she realized it or not. I was sure that she hadn't gone all the way, that there was still something of my daughter in her. I can't really explain why. More intuition, I suppose."

"Hope springs eternal."

"Well, yeah. We've got to keep moving. Otherwise they win, don't they? Even if things look hopeless, we've got to try to make it better. That's what makes us who we are."

"But what if Natalie didn't want rehabilitation? What then?"

"You want to know if I'd kill her?"

"I want to know how you would feel if she rejected your help."

"Listen, no offense, but I'm just a shoe salesman. I don't go into all this touchy-feely crap. I understand that there are gray areas and stuff, but even these days some things are still black-and-white. You don't let your kids destroy themselves, no matter how good an idea they think it might be. If your daughter was a drug addict and couldn't stop, would you just throw up your hands? She's not in her right mind. You have to make the decision for her. You have to do the best you can to make her better, then hope to God she understands and appreciates it later."

"You sound like an idealist."

"Not at all. Actually, I hate that word. An ideal is something you hope for, but never achieve. I'm more interested in getting things done."

## CHOICES

It's been months, I think, since everything changed. I've come to realize there are so few people I can turn to. Bobby is slowly wearing out, trying to hold on and help keep me sane. Somehow it has to end and I have to start being his mother again. He needs help, too. I know he's not handling this as well as he pretends. He's proud to be so independent, but that only goes so far.

Despite how big a mess my life is, and that I am, some amazing things have happened that make me think there's a purpose to it all. I don't know anything about the internet, but I found this list. If it's as protected as everyone here says, how did I get here? Was I led here? Did God bring me here to do something good, even after everything that's happened and everything I've done?

But if there is a God and He brought me here, why did He let me suffer so much? Is this the same God who forced Bobby to close his blinds every night so he didn't see what his father did in the rabbit hutch? Is this the same God that made me shoot my husband and lie to everyone I know?

It can't work like that.

I believe in God. I believe that He sent Christ to die on the cross to save our souls. I believe in the Devil, now more than ever. I believe in good and evil. But I don't believe that God can let us suffer and then expect anything in return.

The Bible shows God as understanding. Protecting. "Praise be to the lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth." I was torn by their teeth. Where was God then?

I believe God made the world and made me. Maybe He even had a part in making the things like that woman and

Richard. God might have had a purpose for the world, but on the day my life changed, God's purpose for me changed. He turned His back on me. But I survived, and since I did, I think I get to decide if God's plan is the right one for me now. I get to choose whether my place in the world is the right one for me. I might choose wrong, but if things like that woman and the Devil can exist, I think God can make mistakes, too. He made Adam and Eve, but they ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge. He flooded the world when sin was out of control. If God was perfect, He wouldn't need to correct His mistakes.

So after everything that's happened to me, has God brought me to this place to correct His mistake? Does bringing me here make up for all my suffering? Am I supposed to do something so good now that it makes up for everything? Maybe. But if I do, it'll be my decision. God exists and sets things in motion, but I decide what happens to me and Bobby from now on.

## FATE

"So what did you plan to do once you'd taken Natalie back? Go back to your life as though nothing happened? You said people who believe what you do should be organized. Doesn't that imply some kind of long-term goal?"

"I don't see why it has to be one way or the other. If I hadn't been forced to shoot those things, I wouldn't have been arrested. I mean, how do you charge someone for doing what has to be done? I took care of a danger, like killing a rat or putting down a rabid dog? You don't want to do it, but you have to. It shakes you up, but after a while, things go back to normal. Why should this be any different?"

"Do you feel any remorse for what you've done?"

"Why should I? You haven't seen that guy, have you? Go look at his body. You'll understand why I had to do it."

"I think you should know. The bodies of your victims were cremated."

"What? Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe by request of their next of kin."

"All of them? They wouldn't cremate all of them!"

"I didn't mean to upset you. I just wanted to find out if you knew there was no way to confirm your allegations."

"How would I know? Oh, God. Someone's trying to cover this up. Oh, God."

"Please don't upset yourself further, Mr. Parker. We're going to have an opportunity to discuss this at length once you're admitted to the hospital. We have a program suited to just the kind of problems you're facing."

"You're sending me to an asylum? I'm not crazy! I know what I saw! You've got to believe me!"

"Mr. Parker, put the chair down! Guards! Help!"

"I don't want to hurt you! You can't put me away! I'm not crazy! People need to know what happened!"

"Hold him down. I've got a sedative"

"No!"

## A MOMENT'S HESITATION

Not everyone reacts the same way in a crisis situation, especially one that's sudden and terrifying. Events occur faster than the human mind can process, and while the average person struggles to make sense of what happens, the tragedy plays out before his eyes. It takes a rare combination of courage, wits and selflessness to act without thought, to face danger without considering the cost.

The precious few who act when the world comes unglued are often called heroes. The ones who freeze are often dismissed as inept, or worse, they are forgotten.

But being caught in a bank robbery or seeing someone choking in a restaurant is nothing compared to the shock and violence of the imbuing. Not only are potential hunters called upon to act under stressful and horrifying conditions, they have to come to grips with the existence of creatures that go against everything they have been taught to believe about the world and nature itself. And they must decide to do all this in the blink of an eye. The Messengers, it seems, have no time for souls who hesitate upon hearing the call.

The imbued have a number of names for people who are shown the truth but do not act. The most charitable one is *bystander*, but more militant and critical hunters refer to them as *duds*. To the imbued, it's bad enough that most people are ignorant and blind to the peril in their midst. Those who see the danger yet don't do anything about it can be worthy of nothing but scorn.

But even the best people are caught off-guard at times. One moment, they're lost in the thousand distractions of their daily lives. The next, they hear voices in their heads and see a creature out of their worst nightmares. Naturally, they freeze, perhaps out of surprise, fear or simple confusion. Then, the moment is gone in the blink of an eye. The monster looks like a normal person once more, and the world is back to the way it was.

Many hunters assume that bystanders simply forget the things they see and go back to being docile members of the herd. The truth is that many are haunted by the things that they witness, as much so as any of the imbued. They replay their moment of revelation over and over in their minds,

trying to come to terms with what they saw and what they should have done. More than a few try to convince themselves that they've lost their minds, because the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

Yet, if they aren't insane, then monsters exist and are out there preying on humanity. They could be anywhere, anyone, from the homeless man glaring balefully out of a shadowy alley to the itinerant minister whose smile always seems so artificial. There's no way to know for sure. Every chance meeting could be a brush with death, or something else unimaginable.

Hunters are given just enough to be frightened, to seek out monsters and to confront them. Bystanders learn just enough to be afraid. For the most part, they have no second sight, they have no edges, and they don't know where to go to for help.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

From the hunter perspective, the imbuing can seem like a test with only two possible outcomes — pass or fail. A person either accepts what she's shown and takes on the mantle of the imbued, or she proves unworthy and goes back to being just another member of the witless masses. But like everything else where monsters and humanity are concerned, things really aren't so clear-cut.

The truth is that people's ability to rationalize away the things that they see extends only so far, and the assumption that bystanders block out what they see and go back to their lives like nothing happened is a profound misconception. The very purpose of the imbuing is to strip away a person's illusions and show him the truth in a way that he can't deny. Everyone who receives the message is marked by it irrevocably, whether he responds instinctively or not. It's never a question of if the person is changed by the experience, but how much. After a "failed" imbuing, bystanders know too much about the real world to feel complacent in their everyday lives, but they lack the edges and special sight to take action without enormous risk. By the same token, bystanders aren't as alienated from the mundane world by the imbuing as hunters often are, because they see the truth for only a few moments and maybe they imagined it. Yet, because they do not receive the Heralds' gifts, they are more vulnerable to the monsters' corruptive touch than full-fledged hunters are. They are heir to the strengths and weaknesses of both worlds, yet they cannot truly claim to belong to either.

### HUMAN NATURE

No one knows what criteria the Messengers use to decide who receives the imbuing. A respected

member of the community may be passed over, while a two-bit car thief is given the chance to take back the night. One characteristic is absolute, even if prospective candidates don't know it: No one who already carries the monsters' taint is chosen, whether they are aware of their supernatural affiliations or not. By virtue of invitation to the imbuing, the same holds true for the lost. They can't be (or have been) blood slaves, latent sorcerers or werewolf kin, much less actual monsters such as vampires or zombies, or they would never receive the revelation in the first place. Hunters and bystanders emerge from completely mundane human stock. It's their own resolve and reaction to a confrontation with monsters that divides them.

However, while the Heralds ensure that the imbued cannot be subverted by monsters' corruption, the same does not hold true for the lost. A bystander can become a blood slave or even a full-fledged vampire, or in death, he can potentially return as a restless spirit or a walking corpse, the same as any normal person might. Certainly, no hunter is sure that he is immune to conversion into the enemy (it is perhaps his greatest fear), but bystanders have no hope of any kind of divine protection. After all, they failed to undergo the change that others did, so surely they're not worthy in a multitude of ways. Made among the lost who manage to find genuine imbued and confront the truth of the world, this realization forces bystanders to be more pragmatic and less judgmental where both monsters and mortals are concerned. The line between the two is indistinguishable, and it could be crossed at any moment, by any means.

(Note: A bystander who is ever changed into a creature or who gains monstrous supernatural capabilities loses all bystander status, including any special Merits or Flaws that he might possess — see p. 42.)

### MIXED BLESSINGS

Whatever the Messengers' ultimate motives may be, their method of empowering the human race certainly seems arbitrary and uncompromising. There appears to be no patience for a prospective hunter's hesitation, and for all anyone knows, there is no second chance once the die is cast.

By virtue of their inaction, most bystanders forfeit the second sight, knowledge of the hunter code and the edges that the imbued manifest. By the same token, the lost rarely seem to be led to find kindred spirits in cyberspace, so the vast majority of bystanders remain ignorant of hunter-net and its associated lists. The severe minority of these people who are on the lists seems to bear this theory out. Such abandonment by the Heralds, more than anything else, is a severe burden for the lost, which

isolates them from valuable sources of support and information. Bystanders are largely left to fall back on their own wits and meager means to try to do something about the terrors that they witnessed during their ill-fated awakening.

This is not to say that the lost are entirely helpless, however. Much of monsters' ability to hide among the masses comes from people's propensity to rationalize unexplained events to make them jibe with their own preconceptions. Most people would sooner believe that a bear escaped from a zoo than accept the image of an eight-foot-tall werewolf rampaging down a city street. When the lost receive their revelation, they have no choice but to know the truth of what they witness, even for a moment, and the scars of such a traumatic experience grant them a certain resilience in the face of future terrors. They are better able to keep their wits when confronted by the supernatural, and they can resist attempts to control or influence their minds, albeit much less effectively than the imbued can.

Additionally, while bystanders are initially much more isolated than the imbued, the lack of any assistance from the Heralds spurs the lost to seek out others by spotting subtle physical and mental signs in the faces of people they pass each day on the street. A bystander can meet a person's eyes and see the pain inspired by the imbuing, much as survivors of any shared ordeal can recognize that something that they have in common, which no one else can understand. While this recognition is a simple and effective way of identifying potential allies, there is no way to tell whether the individual in question is a fellow bystander or one of the imbued without actually talking to him, which is not without risk. Sometimes bystanders reach out unknowingly to unstable hunters who have an unforgiving perspective on "duds," and they find themselves manipulated into becoming sacrificial lambs to further the abusers' goals. In one infamous event, a prominent hunter called Memphis68 used one of the lost as a human bomb in order to destroy a particularly well protected vampire. While many among the hunter community denounce Memphis, others believe that bystanders are to blame for their own treatment, because they failed the imbuing in the first place.

For more details on bystander special capabilities, see the character-creation section later in this chapter.

## REVELATIONS

While some among the imbued view bystanders as failed hunters, many of the lost don't even know that hunters exist. Since the Heralds appear to imbue as many individuals as they do groups, a significant number of bystanders never realize that there's more to the

### BYSTANDERS AND CREDOS

**Hunter's** creeds are intended to provide you with a basis to define your character's perspective on the hunt. They might seem to be rather single-minded classifications, but the system merely illustrates the tendency toward obsession and extremism to which all hunters are prone. The specificity of each creed's edges reinforces this concept, and in some ways, a creed's edges dictate a character's course of action by virtue of what they enable him to do, whether to attack, forgive or contemplate.

Bystanders have no creeds. Since they do not receive edges, nor are many of them even aware of the existence of hunters, the lost aren't predisposed to any "tight" way to deal with monsters. They're more likely to be flexible and open-minded in their approach to problems, taking things on a case-by-case basis. In fact, some thoughtful hunters wonder if the pragmatism and open-mindedness of the lost isn't the glue that fractious imbued need to remain together. This observation also raises the interesting notion that perhaps bystanders aren't "rejects" after all, but they were chosen intentionally for their reactions and assigned their own subtle, crucial contribution to the cause.

imbuing than a cryptic and terrifying realization that the world is not as it seems.

When the lost talk about how they received their revelation, it begins no differently than any hunter's imbuing. Some feel a vague sense of foreboding early in the day, which worsens as the hours pass toward nightfall. Some feel a strange urge to take a detour into a part of town that they might ordinarily never visit. Other times, the moment comes completely without warning, in the middle of an everyday routine such as a trip to the store or an early morning jog. One way or another, the Messengers seem to guide each person's path toward an encounter with a monster, and the circumstances are as unique as the individual.

Like the imbued, most bystanders are thrown into the path of a violent monster's attack, with the hope of eliciting some instinctive response that will make them receptive to the Heralds' gifts. Even in cases in which bystanders are simply put in a position to witness a creature's existence (such as a spirit haunting an abandoned house), the encounter is orchestrated to spur the person to take instinctive action. That action might be to destroy the monster, to help it find peace or to encourage it to linger

somewhere less inhabited. Regardless, the experience is intended to be sudden and unsettling, to catch each witness off-guard and prompt him or her to react from the soul.

The moment of awakening is no different than any prospective hunter's. A voice may boom in the subject's head, saying, "IT SPREADS PAIN," or a neon sign changes from "Vacancy" to "HAUNTED." Sometimes the warning is subtler, such as a strong smell of newly turned earth or the coppery stench of blood. Some bystanders feel an icy finger race down their spine; others feel a breath of hot air as though they were standing next to a roaring furnace. Then they feel their eyes drawn to the creature as if in a dream.

At the instant they see the monster, their fate hangs in the balance, although no one realizes it until much later. They see a moldering corpse reaching for a young man's throat, or they witness a bloodsucker hypnotizing a victim with his eyes. All onlookers feel the urge to *do something*.

Hunters feel this urge and simply act, whether it's to kill, protect, save or question. Even if they don't understand what's happening, they accept events on face value and react according to their nature. Bystanders hesitate because many can't make the instant leap from the mundane to the supernatural. The first thing they struggle with isn't *what to do* but *whether they are losing their minds*, which is entirely understandable. Others try to think through the situation to come up with the best course of action, all the while accomplishing nothing. Many are simply paralyzed with fear. Sometimes a bystander has every intention to act, but the creature strikes and is gone before he or she can do anything, or the monster incapacitates him with a blow before he can take the initiative. The Heralds would seem to go to considerable lengths to manipulate events leading up to the revelation, but the pieces don't always come together perfectly, and some people have a better chance to prove themselves than others. Right or wrong, the imbuing is a moment of opportunity, no more. Once that moment has passed, the gift of power passes with it.

But most bystanders have no way of knowing this. Unless someone else is present who receives the imbuing successfully, all that the bystander experiences is the revelation and the urge to act. While he formulates a response, the strange feeling goes away, and the creature disappears or looks normal again. At this point, he may finally be able to summon his courage and take action, or he might call for help, or he could still be so stricken with terror that the whole tragedy plays itself out before their disbelieving eyes. No matter what happens, he still witnesses the creature's actions,

and there's no denying the hideousness of witnessing a person torn apart or sucked dry. A bystander may have failed the Messengers' test, but he still bears the weight of what he's seen, and the brief urge he feels to take action assumes increasing significance in the nights to come.

In the event that one or more people are imbued during a bystander's revelation, things become much more complicated. Events happen too quickly to think things through. Self-doubts and feelings of guilt become pronounced afterward. Eventually it seems possible that there was indeed a test—people's lives were at stake, something could have been done—but the bystander failed, even though he may have done nothing obviously wrong. Maybe he's insane. Maybe he hallucinated. Or maybe he was exposed to something vast and important and was found wanting.

Bystanders who live in denial are haunted by their memories until their minds broaden, or they go on to live miserable, selfish lives. Bystanders who consider their failures are invariably tortured by their inadequacy, especially if deaths occurred, and many devote themselves to the hunt as fervently as any of the imbued in the hopes of finding worth. These receptive individuals seek out hunters, hoping for a chance to prove themselves and to hopefully find answers to their many questions. Sometimes, the lost demonstrate a degree of selflessness and fanaticism that gives even seasoned hunters pause. While the imbued fight for ideology or simple survival, bystanders can struggle to validate their own souls. They are as capable of extreme acts as any of the imbued, and in some ways, they are more likely to carry them out as a way of proving their dedication.

### PICKING UP THE PIECES

Hunters are able to define themselves to some extent during and after the imbuing, when they manifest newfound powers and confront the things standing before them. The Heralds' message, hunters' personal beliefs and their new abilities all come together. To some degree, a new individual is born, or an existing one is literally empowered. No matter how much they might want to, the imbued can never truly return to the life they once knew. Monsters are everywhere, and they seem to prey on humanity. The struggle overshadows everything else.

The lost, by contrast, are forced to grope uncertainly for explanations in the aftermath of their heavy-lidded awakening. They're left to find answers for themselves in the context of their normal lives. Where a hunter's sight and powers gradually alienate her from the life she once led, bystanders think of themselves no differently after the revela-

## CHOICE OR CHANCE

Storytellers and players who want to include bystander characters in their chronicles must decide what approach to take when determining the outcome of an imbuing. The easiest route is for you, the player, to decide in advance that you want to play one of the lost. You and the Storyteller should work together to create a prelude and explain the circumstances that cause your character to "fail," even in the presence of other characters who "succeed." This is the suggested method, as hunters and bystanders operate considerably differently, and you can choose which character type appeals to you most.

Conversely, the Storyteller can elect to run the imbuing as a regular roleplaying session, with characters starting out as normal people. Depending on your character's actions, the Storyteller decides if you play a hunter or one of the lost. This approach requires the Storyteller to emphasize the sudden and shocking nature of the imbuing — one moment everything is normal and the next your character is confronted with a terrifying scene. The Storyteller asks you to state what your character does *immediately*. If your character performs an action relevant to one of the creeds, the Storyteller assigns a creed and edges accordingly (as per the alternative creed selection method presented in the *Hunter* core rulebook).

If you can't think of something to do right away, or if your character hesitates for any reason, the Storyteller may decide that your character forfeits the imbuing and becomes a bystander. This approach is true to the apparently arbitrary approach that the Messengers take to the imbuing, and it can help you identify with the resentment that your bystander has at being overlooked. Nevertheless, the Storyteller and players should agree on this approach to the prelude in advance, so that everyone knows what character types might be possible in the game. Ultimately, everyone should enjoy their characters and have fun.

Also understand that there's a difference between bystanders and the other regular people who might be in the vicinity of an imbuing. A bystander is a potential hunter at the right or wrong place and time (he's probably even ushered there by unseen hands). The Messengers have every intention of empowering him, but he fails to choose the form of his power and is left lacking.

Other people who happen to be on the scene — those who weren't ushered there and who have little or no potential as a hunter — are not even candidates for becoming bystanders. They're the sorts of folks who become hysterical in the monster's presence and flee, forgetting everything afterward or failing to understand it in the first place. They're the human masses, the people whom hunters and bystanders might seek to protect, but they are not imbuing material in any way.

tion than they did before. They can't see monsters simply by concentrating, or exhale toxic gas or hide in plain sight. Hunters cannot help but think of themselves in terms of "the same yet changed — or something else entirely." Meanwhile, the lost are still firmly rooted in the mundane world, and they draw strength from normality after the severe shock of the Heralds' intrusion.

At first, many bystanders try to forget what they've seen. Some resort to desperate measures such as drinking or taking drugs. Most suffer nightmares, bouts of paranoia or severe anxiety. The more they try to deny their exposure, the more their minds tend to pick up odd details in the news or on the street. A string of unexplained murders near the docks takes on an unsettling significance. A man in the grocery checkout line, who never utters a sound and has strange, dead eyes makes a bystander's skin go cold. It's not that monsters are invisible. They're just adept at disguising their true nature, and most people aren't

alert enough to notice the small details that give them away. Not so for the lost. The more time that passes, the more they notice.

But there's a big difference between noticing something strange and doing something about it. Bystanders react to the mounting evidence of monsters in one of three ways, generally defining their motivations and willingness to take action.

**Aggressive.** The aggressive bystander concludes that it's only a matter of time before he or someone he loves will fall prey to the things that seem to be out there. The thought of his own death is bad enough, but he'll be damned if he'll let his family or friends be slaughtered like sheep. The aggressive among the lost believe that the only way to survive is to accept the thin evidence at hand and take the offensive, identifying and confronting any and all monsters — whether over the sights of a high-powered rifle or through attempts at negotiation or compromise. They would rather be the masters of their own fate than helpless victims waiting for the axe.



**Cautious.** Cautious bystanders suspect the dangers that monsters pose to humanity, but unless they or the people they care about are threatened, they see no sense in risking their lives. They witness enough during the revelation to know that the odds are severely stacked against them if they ever decide to confront one of the monsters. The cautious prefer to think everything through very carefully, and they take action only when it's absolutely necessary. However, once they decide that a confrontation is inevitable, they don't hesitate to do what they must. They prefer to live and let live, but they will go through hell and back to protect what's theirs.

**Fearful.** Every bystander is scared at first. Lock the doors. Put bars on the windows. Have the corner store deliver the damn groceries. Monsters are *everywhere*, and the fearful among the lost pray that the creatures will pass them by if they don't attract any attention. Sure, they might theoretically be able to take care of one or maybe even two things, but there could be *hundreds* out there. What difference would their efforts make except to invite a hideous death for themselves and their loved ones? Fearful bystanders live in constant paranoia, alert to any sign that the monsters might notice them. If pressed, they abandon their homes and run like hell to avoid a confrontation. They won't abandon friends or family, no matter how bad things get, but they look for some way to misdirect monsters rather than deal with them face-to-face. They believe that survival is the best that anyone has a right to expect in a world inhabited by these creatures.

These reactions aren't concrete classifications that pigeonhole bystanders. They represent different philosophies, so they are subject to change based on shifting circumstances. As stated previously, most bystanders are fearful at the beginning, beset by the possibility of finding horrific beings at every turn. Faced with such overwhelming odds, many adopt a siege mentality and retreat into their homes, hoping to avoid notice. But while they can possibly isolate themselves, they can't do the same for the people they care about. When it becomes clear that loved ones are in danger, a fearful bystander may summon the resolve to make a cautious stand.

If her first few confrontations are successful, that individual might become even bolder. If victories continue, she may decide that she wants to be in control of her life again. Her outlook could become aggressive.

Conversely, some of the lost are compelled to take matters by the horns from the beginning. Once they accept that monsters might not only be real but pervasive, they become aggressive at once, seeking creatures out and dealing with them. Although they

might be successful, it can become clear that for every threat they eliminate two more seem to emerge. Initial determination wears down, and the aggressive start to pull back somewhat, abandoning their ambitious ideals and settling for a more pragmatic approach. But the tide of horror only seems to rise higher. Not only do creatures grow more numerous, but every battle gives the enemy more information about their tormentor. Finally, the things strike close to home, and someone the now-cautious bystander loves is killed or corrupted. The tragedy shatters resolve, and these people become mere timid shadows of their former selves.

Feelings of guilt or failure also play a large role in a bystander's outlook, and they can inspire rapid changes therein. A bystander who stood by helplessly while others died that first time might be fearful by nature, but when his guilt becomes overpowering, he is aggressive for brief periods before lapsing back into fear again. Or one of the lost who witnessed another person being imbued and is tormented by thoughts that he failed a test might be aggressive from the start, eager to prove himself before God and his peers. Such a person might stay locked in that one mindset constantly, never allowing doubts or setbacks to deter him.

No matter what motivations ultimately drive the lost to act, their ultimate goal is not to forge some nebulous new order out of the ruins of the old, but to preserve and protect themselves and the people and places that they have known all their lives. Unlike the imbued, they have no radical vision for the future, only a desire to preserve the status quo. The simple, mundane routines of life are a bulwark against the insanity that the monsters represent. In some ways, this foundation makes the lost greater champions of the common man than hunters themselves.

### **FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS**

A hunter who goes after monsters solo lives on borrowed time. For the lost who have nothing but wits and resourcefulness on their side, finding allies is crucial. However, without access to the hunter code or the likelihood of otherworldly prompting to find hunter-net, the lost have nowhere to turn for help. Many find themselves searching the faces of those they pass on the street, hoping for some sign that they aren't the only ones who've seen the truth. Others place cryptic ads in newspapers and on bulletin boards, hoping that a kindred spirit will see past the euphemisms and pick up the phone. For the most part, they are disappointed.

On very rare occasions, a bystander simply bumps into a hunter or another of the lost, probably in a public place. A persistent and computer-savvy individual might also manage to find his way onto

hunter-net. For the most part, though, the lost cross paths with potential allies in the process of studying, following or stalking monsters. They might notice another figure shadowing a quarry or staking out a creature's lair. When curiosity demands a closer look, they realize that they have found a peer. If the individual in question is one of the imbued, the encounter can range from dangerous to joyous. When two bystanders meet, they typically forge an immediate and expedient bond based on the simple necessities of survival. Just to be able to talk to another soul about the terrors that they've witnessed is a blessing that many hunters fail to appreciate.

Unlike hunter groups, which can be contentious even at the best of times, bystander allies tend to be extremely tight-knit. Where hunters sometimes favor a dispersed and fluid organization for increased safety, the lost prefer to circle the wagons and cover each other's backs. Phone numbers and addresses are exchanged, and some of the lost even go so far as to name compatriots as beneficiaries in their wills. Group members maintain close contact, forging sometimes wildly dissimilar individuals into ad hoc families. Ideologies and prejudices are set aside in the face of sheer horror and the struggle for survival. Not only do the lost tend to believe in strength of numbers, they often depend on mutual support to retain their sanity. Some bystander organizations are little more than emotional support groups, providing advice and a sympathetic ear when things become too terrible for any member to cope with. The imbued who are familiar with such groups often warn the members that their close associations make them vulnerable if monsters capture and interrogate any single member. As far as the lost are concerned, the odds are already so stacked against them that they haven't got much to lose. And if the group is able to do some good in the meantime, it's worth the risk.

Of the few known active bystander groups, nearly all are grassroots organizations that don't operate beyond the scope of a single city, or in some cases, a single neighborhood. Their concerns are local and specific. Their focus on preserving their normal lives conflicts with tackling larger issues such as hunter-bystander relations or the global struggle against monsters. Although it's possible for isolated bystander groups to take advantage of the Internet to build a larger community like the hunters', they are typically too preoccupied with day-to-day concerns to achieve such an initiative.

### **LOST AND FOUND**

Even though they share a common origin and a common antagonist, the relationship between

the imbued and lost is often contentious. Sometimes, it is even poisoned by prejudice on both sides that portrays the other as unpredictable and untrustworthy. Hunters who fought and bled during the imbuing while a bystander looked on are quick to suggest that the lost are cowards or fools. Of the handful of lost who have discovered hunter-net since its inception, nearly all have been driven away by resentment and cynicism. Cooler heads among the imbued have tried to shout down the virulent ones, but even the most open-minded hunters admit reluctantly that bystanders' vulnerability to corruption makes them more of a liability than an asset in the struggle against the darkness.

The accusations are far from one-sided, however. While some bystanders seek out hunters in order to amend their apparent failure, others consider the imbued little different from the creatures. They point to atrocities such as the nightclub fire set by God45, which claimed more than 50 innocent lives, or to Memphis68's infamous use of bystanders as cannon fodder. More importantly, some of the lost feel that the imbued — having been bequeathed amazing capabilities to oppose monsters — have lost their humanity in the bargain. Some bystanders even go so far as to hint that one day monsters may be no more, and the lost will have to hunt the hunters to prevent another cycle of domination from beginning.

Yet despite the rancor, some bystanders and hunters refuse to be blinded by prejudice and find ways to work together that show how both parties complement each other. Although the lost are certainly more vulnerable to monsters' powers, they can still drive a car, do research, plant a bomb, pull a trigger, distract the police, provide medical attention, reassure allies' families, talk a friend down, and even throw a punch if needs be. Also, because they are generally better grounded and more open to finding practical solutions to problems, regardless of personal beliefs, bystanders are adept at bringing people together for a common purpose. Most important of all, they are an important source of moral and psychological support, pulling hunters back from dizzying heights to focus on the mundane world and what they're really fighting for. The lost serve as a bridge between hunters and the lives that they once knew, a lifeline that will become increasingly important as more and more hunters reach for levels of power that humans may well have never been meant to attain.

## CHARACTER CREATION

This section contains rules for creating bystander characters and adding them to an existing Hunter

chronicle, or creating a new kind of chronicle that centers specifically on the lost and their personal struggles for humanity and salvation. Unlike many hunters, who see their imbuing as an event that elevates them above the rest of humanity, bystanders see the Messengers' revelation as a nightmarish assault on their long-held perceptions and beliefs. Where the imbued see their empowerment as a mandate to save the world, the lost fight when they must to protect what they have always known and loved. One group looks forward and can lose itself in the cause. The other clings to the here and now and fights to stay sane in a world where nothing is what it seems. They are two sides of the same coin, alike and yet fundamentally different.

As a result, two aspects of play are unique for bystander characters: Conviction and Virtue.

### CONVICTION

Hunters use Conviction as the fire that fuels their edges and increases their Virtues, reflecting their growing determination and commitment to the hunt. Since bystanders do not have access to edges and they do not use Virtues in the same way as the imbued, Conviction serves a very different role for them. It's a measure of their values and beliefs — their fundamental assumptions of life as they want it to be. Conviction is a measure of your character's grip on himself and the world around him — the benchmark of his sanity.

All bystander characters begin play with 10 Conviction, but as each character is forced to confront monsters — and he uncovers how pervasive their power and influence is — trauma wears away at Conviction and the Trait decreases. When a character's Conviction drops to 3, he gains a derangement, just like hunters who achieve a Virtue rating of 7. A bystander gains an additional derangement for each Conviction point he loses after 3 (a second ailment at 2 Conviction and a third at 1), or he suffers an increase in the severity of a derangement he already possesses. When a bystander loses his last point of Conviction, his mind snaps under the relentless pressure of the horrors he has witnessed. Your character is a raving madman, and he passes into the hands of the Storyteller. At his discretion, the Storyteller can allow players to continue controlling bystanders who have lost their Conviction, but this option should be exercised with great care. Your character is literally too insane to think or act productively. Apart from the occasional lunatic insight, he hampers play more than he helps it.

Once a point of Conviction is lost, it cannot be regained through experience points or play. Rather, bystander characters avoid losing Conviction

through the use of their own special Virtues. Once per game session, you may trade a point of Virtue for a point of Conviction. Essentially, your character loses a part of his better nature in the face of mounting desperation and fear.

This mitigating exchange implies that bystanders fight a losing battle against the pervasive terror of the World of Darkness. They may struggle against the monsters for as long as they can, but their minds will simply give way one day under the weight of everything they've seen and done, just as hunters are ultimately consumed by the power that they seek to wield.

## VIRTUES

Bystanders use Virtues as a bulwark against the horror they experience when confronting monsters or witnessing their depredations. Instead of Mercy, Vision and Zeal, which represent hunter devotion, the lost take strength from their own better natures: Courage, Reason and Self-Control. When your bystander is exposed to a monster or the results of its actions, the Storyteller may call for a Virtue roll to see if your character can face the stress of the experience without losing any Conviction. The following are some examples of when a Virtue roll is required, although the Storyteller has the final say on what situation does or does not demand a roll.

**Seeing a monster's true appearance.** Most creatures have a variety of powers to disguise their terrifying nature from humans. Witnessing a zombie's decaying form or the fanged, corpse-like face of a vampire challenges a bystander's long-held, fundamental beliefs about the mundane world. Consequently, it requires a Virtue roll.

Note that some monsters, such as sorcerers or werebeasts in human form, do not have an outward appearance that identifies their true nature immediately, so the sight of them as people behaving normally is not enough to test your bystander's sanity. Likewise, ghosts that make no overt, worldly demonstration of their presence and true nature go unseen by bystanders.

Some monsters — werewolves in man-beast form, manifested ghosts, the walking dead and nightmares — radiate an effect that immediately overwhelms or dulls the minds of regular people who encounter them. Bystanders' limited experience with the supernatural can allow them to resist these effects — to see the truth and try to cope with it. See the hardened spirit special ability, and the "Monsters and the Human Mind" sidebar for details. That capability doesn't eliminate the need to make the appropriate Virtue rolls, however.

Being exposed to the use of supernatural powers. Watching a manifested ghost climb into a human body, a werewolf heal a devastating injury instantaneously or a vampire move at an impossible speed is an assault on a normal person's fundamental understanding of the world. In the case of sorcerers, many uses of magic are extremely subtle, and they can be rationalized as coincidence. As a rule of thumb, any use of supernatural power that a character notices in the real world and cannot rationalize away immediately requires a Virtue roll. This rule includes attempts at mind-control directed at your character, or witnessing bizarre phenomena such as ghostly illusions (walls bleeding, disembodied voices). Even if your character resists such effects (see hardened spirit), the very occurrence of such phenomena is enough to strain his grip on reality and require a Virtue roll.

Note that witnessing hunter edges in use does not test bystanders' sanity, invoke a Virtue roll or cause a Conviction penalty. The lost can tolerate the amazing feats hunters' perform since bystanders and the imbued are tied to each other and possessed of a common spirit.

**Observing a monster while it preys on a victim.** The sight of a vampire drinking blood from a victim's neck, or a manifested ghost feeding directly on the emotions of a tortured family is enough to prey upon the mind of the strongest person. Even in cases where monsters clash with one another, the sight of these hideous creatures shedding one another's blood tests the boundaries of "normal" existence and requires a Virtue roll.

**Discovering evidence of a monster's handiwork.** Stumbling onto a bloodless corpse or finding the blood-soaked remnants of a bizarre forest ritual is enough to shake a person's resolve and demand a Virtue roll. Likewise, turning around to find that a room's furniture has been swiftly and silently stacked into a pyramid, or switching on the light in a basement and discovering an open coffin is sufficient to test a bystander's sanity and require a Virtue roll.

**Confronting a monster directly.** Attacking, intercepting or merely communicating directly with a known monster is the ultimate test of an individual's grip on his sanity, and it requires a Virtue roll.

The rate at which the Storyteller asks you to roll Virtues ultimately determines the longevity of your character and chronicle. He might ask you to roll Virtues frequently in a single game session to reflect the stresses put upon your bystander, as well as the immediate danger of insanity she faces. Otherwise, the Storyteller might insist on Virtue rolls only a few times each game session, maybe no more than once per scene, regardless of the actual Virtue rolled. Such



a pace would extend a bystander's existence and your game a little further.

Repeated exposure to the same sights and experiences can help build your character's resolve and help her resist the fear of similar encounters in the future. The Storyteller decides when a bystander is no longer fazed by yet another corpse or disembodied voice. Perhaps three similar encounters offer a reduced difficulty on subsequent Virtue rolls. It might even be possible to negate the need for Virtue rolls if experiences occur often enough — say, trying to speak to a monster. By that time, a character may have a strategy that he uses in such instances, even though he can never enter a dialogue or open a coffin absolutely fearlessly.

When a Virtue roll is called for, roll Wits + the relevant Virtue (difficulty 7). The Storyteller may modify the difficulty up or down, depending on the circumstances. If the roll succeeds, your character loses no Conviction, and his grip on reality is unaffected. Should the roll fail, your character may still carry on, but she loses a point of Conviction in the process. Her sanity has been seriously strained by what she has seen or done, leaving emotional scars that can never fully heal.

If the roll botches, your character loses not only a Conviction point, but a point of the relevant Virtue as

well. Your character succumbs to the stress of the situation and panics, attempting to flee from the source of the disturbance if at all possible.

In extreme cases (discovering that a loved one has been turned into a monster, for example), the Storyteller may rule that your character suffers a temporary derangement. In either case — a botched roll or the acquisition of an ailment — your character essentially behaves as a regular person with low Willpower in the face of the supernatural (see the "Monsters and the Human Mind" sidebar).

Virtues are rated from 1 to 5, and they may increase during play with experience points at a cost of your character's *current* Virtue score x 2.

#### COURAGE

Courage is a measure of your bystander's bravery in the face of the supernatural. The Storyteller may call for a Courage roll any time your character attempts an action that brings him into conflict with a monster or one of its servants. Attacking a zombie with a pipe requires a Courage roll, for example, as does driving a stake through a sleeping vampire's heart. The general rule of thumb is that any act that could draw the direct attention of a monster requires a Courage roll before your character can proceed.

**REASON**

The Reason Virtue reflects your character's capacity to reconcile what he learns about monsters in relation to the world as he knows it. The Storyteller may call for a Reason roll at any time your bystander uncovers new information about the nature or identity of a monster. Discovering that a local schoolteacher is one of the walking dead requires a Reason roll, for instance, as does the discovery that werewolves do, in fact, exist. Suppositions and rumors are not sufficient to require a Reason roll, though. Your character must see incontrovertible evidence or uncover proof that validates an idea or theory about the supernatural. Being told that Mr. Brinkwater is a vampire is not enough. Seeing a picture of the young man dating from 1911 confirms the rumor and calls for a Reason roll.

**SELF-CONTROL**

Self-Control represents your character's ability to stand resolute in the face of horror. The Virtue determines how your character reacts to sudden, shocking events or realizations, such as stumbling onto a bloodless corpse or discovering too late that he has entered a haunted house. The general rule is that the Storyteller may call for a Self-Control roll when your character is exposed to a terrifying supernatural experience.

For information on determining your character's starting Virtues, refer to step four of the character-creation process, p. 55.

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

While bystander characters do not have access to the inexplicable powers of the imbued, their brush with the Heralds and the rigors of life afterward provide the lost with two special capabilities.

**Shared Ordeal.** No matter how much a person tries to hide his emotional scars, someone who has suffered through a similar ordeal can pick up subtle clues that identify that person as a fellow survivor. Bystanders are able to identify other bystanders and hunters with a successful Perception roll (difficulty 6). Recognition usually occurs in person, but it could also occur through television, photographs or even by radio or the Internet. The subject in question would have to express some kind of emotion or stress in or behind her countenance or presentation.

As a side note, it's entirely possible that hunters share the same capability, but with more efficient methods of finding each other (such as the Word and hunter-net) at their disposal, they simply haven't thought to try. Perhaps hunters in remote areas have indeed manifested their own version of this capacity.

**MONSTERS AND THE HUMAN MIND**

People are plagued by a world full of monsters that they cannot see, thanks to centuries of cultural and societal pressure (no doubt abetted by monsters) that conditions the human mind to reject what it cannot logically explain. If a person sees a ghost or a ghostly power in effect, such as words appearing in blood on a wall, he is terrified and he flees. However, as soon as the incident passes or he escapes, his brain rationalizes what he saw to make it correspond with what he "knows" to be true about the physical world. This effect applies to ghosts, werewolves, the walking dead and nightmares (and perhaps even to vampires and wizards, if the Storyteller chooses) when they reveal themselves for what they truly are or perform a supernatural display in public.

Regular people react to the sight of the supernatural with a varying degree of terror and panic relative to their Willpower scores. A low Willpower (1 to 3) results in the individual running in terror or fainting dead away. A moderate Willpower (4-7) allows a person to stand and watch, gibbering and disbelieving. Someone with a high Willpower (8-10) is terrified but still able to perform minor functions such as walk away, pick up an item and leave or begin rationalizing away what he sees. He certainly cannot attack or talk to a monster or remain on the scene for more than a turn, however. Regardless of Willpower score, any mortal mind that isn't already hardened to the experience blocks it out immediately afterward and forgets it entirely.

Without bystanders' capacity to spend Willpower to resist these effects, they would be as vulnerable to the presence of the supernatural as any normal human. (And yet, your ability to spend Willpower to allow your character to resist supernatural experiences doesn't preclude him from potentially losing Conviction points in the presence of a monster. You must still make Virtue rolls.)

**Hardened Spirit.** There are many individual reasons why the lost turn away from the Messengers, but the most common is fear. The shock of seeing a monster for the first time freezes the blood and crushes the spirit, leaving scars that time can never fully heal. However, once the terror of the revelation finally diminishes, the lost emerge from their ordeal hardened by what they have seen. While they still fear the thought of confronting a monster, the shock of seeing one does not affect them so severely ever again.



Bystanders are toughened somewhat by what they see, and their minds are warped enough that they can resist a monster's mind- and emotion-altering powers (mind control, induced fear) and body-control powers (partial and full possession) with the expenditure of one Willpower point. Your character can stand in the presence of a raging man-beast, manifested spirit, shambling zombie or bizarre nightmare without panicking and fleeing in fear as regular people do. The Storyteller also decides if your character senses when a mind-, emotion- or body-manipulation power is used on him. Such defense might even be possible when a bystander is not awake or conscious of what's going on around him. His subconscious mind has been affected by the truth of the world, too, and it can throw up its own barriers against supernatural influence. Therefore, a Willpower point can be spent for your character whether or not he knows that danger looms. If your character is not aware of a mind-, body- or emotion-control threat, the Storyteller might spend a Willpower point secretly on your behalf. You might discover the loss later when your character is "suddenly" tapped out, exhausted or he simply has no more Willpower to spend. (You should certainly be updated about your character's Willpower score between game sessions.)

If the Storyteller decides that your character cannot resist a monster's influence unconsciously — say the being is exceptionally subtle or powerful — your bystander might be subject to its commands later in a story or the chronicle. The Storyteller might take control of your character for periods of time, whether with your knowledge (in the middle of a game session) or without your knowledge (during downtime). Your character might not discover that he's a puppet until he's confronted with the facts of his unwitting actions. He might try to drive out the corrupting influence completely at that time, or just temporarily. The Storyteller decides if a Willpower point spent at that time ends the monster's control permanently or just temporarily. A bystander who's subject to a vampire's blood bond probably breaks the bond temporarily, for example.

The effects of spending Willpower apply for an entire scene, whether to make your character immune to fear or outside control, or to allow him to resist ongoing control for a short period. Willpower cannot be spent to break extended monster influence in the same scene in which the control is achieved. Freedom must come later — perhaps scenes, days or even weeks later — at the Storyteller's discretion. The Storyteller also has the final say on whether spending Willpower is

effective against the powers of particularly old or potent monsters.

Note that spending a Willpower point toward hardened spirit does not make your character capable of seeing supernatural creatures that hide with their powers. A vampire that stands unseen in plain sight thanks to a magical effect still goes unseen by your bystander. Likewise, a ghost that does not manifest or cause a disturbance in the material world is not apparent to your character. Hardened spirit does not allow bystanders to perceive that which would remain hidden from them supernaturally. Finally, bystanders do not have a special power to see through or recognize illusions or hallucinations created by monsters. Those images and sensations appear to be real. Hardened spirit simply allows bystanders to resist the fear and influence powers of creatures that appear willingly

#### BYSTANDER CHARACTER-CREATION PROCESS

- **Step One: Character Concept**

Choose concept, Nature and Demeanor.

- **Step Two: Choose Attributes**

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social and Mental (6/4/3). Your character has one dot in each Attribute automatically.

Rate Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Rate Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Rate Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

- **Step Three: Choose Abilities**

Prioritize the three categories: Talents, Skills and Knowledges (11/7/4).

Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges.

No Ability higher than 3 at this stage.

- **Step Four: Choose Advantages**

Choose Backgrounds (5) and rate Virtues (7).

- **Step Five: Last Touches**

Record Conviction (standard 10) and Willpower (standard 3).

Spend freebie points (21). Abilities can be raised to 4 or 5 at this time. Purchase Merits and Flaws (*optional*).

#### FREEBIE POINT COSTS

Attributes — 5 points per dot

Abilities — 2 points per dot

Backgrounds — 1 point per dot

Willpower — 1 point per dot

Virtues — 2 points per dot

(and usually horrifically), and that attempt to manipulate the lost directly.

Hardened spirit does not work against the mind-, emotion- or body-control powers of hunters. Their edges work normally on bystanders.

Hardened spirit is not an alternative to the need to make a Virtue roll when the character sees, experiences or performs something monstrous. Rather, spending Willpower simply allows your character to remain at a horrific or inexplicable scene when other regular people would panic and escape. Having the resolve to remain, watch and even participate still demands Virtue rolls, and it could result in the loss of Conviction points.

## STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

There is more to a good character than a collection of dots on a page. Like a real person, a character needs to have friends, family, hobbies — all the details that help define who he is and why he puts his sanity on the line. This kind of development is particularly crucial to the lost, because their struggle is grounded in holding onto the lives they've lived, even if those lives are founded on lies. The imbued start with the same origins, but they are driven to become something more as they seek to change the world. Bystanders are just people trying to do the right thing, trying to keep their world from falling apart around them.

The following questions may help you better define your character's identity and what he values in life.

- **What was his childhood like?** Did your character come from a large family or a small one? Does he have brothers and sisters? Is he close to any of them? Does he have a good relationship with his parents, or does he see them only on holidays? Did his character's parents divorce, or did he know only one parent his whole life? Was he raised in a strict, moral environment, or were Mom and Dad too busy working late and taking business trips to spend much time with him? Did he learn to value family traditions and the importance of hearth and home, or is a house just a place where people keep their stuff?

- **Where did he go to school?** Did your character go to public school or private school? Did he get beaten up every morning or hazed by the jocks? Was he a good student, or did he cut class every chance he got? Was he popular? Did he excel at anything? Did he graduate, or was he kicked out? Did he go to college? How did his family pay for it? Did he do well, or did he quit after one semester? Did your character experiment with anything while he was away from Mom and Dad, and how did it work out?

- **What kind of job does he have?** If your character is no longer a student, where does his money come from? Does he work in middle management at an auto-parts company, flip burgers or hustle drugs? Does he like his job, or is he just marking time until he finishes that novel he's been working on? Is he a starving artist or a successful one? Does he have to work odd hours or double shifts? Has he been laid off or fired recently?

- **Who are his friends?** Does your character have only a few close friends or a lot of distant acquaintances? Does he still remain close to people he's known since grade school, or does he change friends every few years? Does he spend a lot of time hanging out with his buddies? Do they have a regular poker night or other weekly get-together? Is he the kind of person who would get up in the middle of the night to go help a friend who had a flat tire, or would he let the call go to voice mail?

- **Does he have a significant other?** Does your character date, or is he in a long-time relationship? Is he lucky in love or a complete disaster? Has he been embittered by a recent breakup that's left him cynical about relationships? Is he married or divorced? If he is divorced or has recently broken up with someone, are they friends or do they hate each other?

- **Does he have a family?** Does your character have children? If so, how many? Is he a doting parent or a distant one? Does he follow the same rules as his parents did, or has he vowed never to treat his kids the way he was treated? Does he have to work overtime and weekends to keep the kids fed, clothed and in school? Do his kids hate him or love him or both? Are they "good kids," or are they always in trouble? If he's divorced, does he have custody of his children? If he doesn't have custody, does he try to see his kids as often as he can?

- **Where does he live?** Does he live in a one-room apartment in a dangerous part of town or in a condo in the suburbs? Does he still live with his parents, or did he inherit their house when they died? Is his place new, or does it have a history? Does he have roommates, and do they all get along? Does he get along well with his landlord or his neighbors? Does he lend tools to others, or does he keep them to himself? Does he have any pets?

- **Is he religious?** What are his religious beliefs? Does he attend church regularly, or does he go on only special occasions? Did he lose his faith at some point in his past, or was he raised as an atheist? Is he a true believer, or does he merely pay lip service to his beliefs?

- **Has he suffered tragedy in his life?** Did he lose a friend or loved one at some point? Did he ever suffer through a terrible illness, or was he the victim of a

violent crime? Was he ever cheated of something that was rightfully his? Has he ever known someone who died after a long, painful disease?

- **What are his vices?** Does he smoke or drink? Does he gamble? Does he have a drug habit? Does he eat too much or sleep too much? Is he a slob? Has he made a commitment to clean up his act? Has he tried in the past, only to fall off the wagon? Has he been clean for a while, but still know that he could slip if he isn't careful?

## NATURE AND Demeanor

The lost, like the imbued, are often called upon to show a different face to the world than the haggard one that stares back at them in the mirror. They conceal their fears and suspicions for the sake of friends and family, managing a smile and a laugh when all they want to do is scream.

All characters have a Nature, which reflects their true personality and perspectives, and a Demeanor, which is the appearance they present to the world. Most often, the two are very similar, but secretive or deceptive individuals might present a false front that conceals a true identity. Rarely, a person might have the same Nature and Demeanor, showing the world exactly who he is and what he cares about, but few people have the courage — or naïveté — to reveal their innermost feelings to the world at large.

You're free to choose from any of the Nature and Demeanor Archetypes presented in the *Hunter* core rulebook (see pp. 97-101), or from any Archetypes introduced in the *Hunter* creed books. You may also choose from any of the new Archetypes listed here.

### BELIEVER

The Believer is certain that there is more to the world than what the human senses reveal. Whether he believes in angels, demons, ghosts or goblins, the Believer knows that the answers to life's mysteries wait to be found by those with the courage and imagination to look for them. The Believer gets his strength not from his own beliefs, however, but from convincing others that his outlandish theories are correct. Cult leaders, paranormal investigators, late-night talk-show hosts and sidewalk Tarot readers can personify the Believer Archetype.

— Regain Willpower if you can convince a non-believer to accept a supernatural explanation for a particular phenomenon or event.

### NEGOTIATOR

The Negotiator believes that life is all about give-and-take, making compromises in order to get ahead. Conflict is wasteful and dangerous, and it should be avoided at all costs. The Negotiator is cautious and clever, looking for ways to make deals

that allow both parties to walk away from a dispute feeling like they got what they wanted. Some Negotiators prefer the challenge of fast-talking their way out of difficult situations, while others are honest folk who prefer a meeting of minds rather than fists. Contract agents, lawyers, con artists and business executives embody the Negotiator persona.

— Regain Willpower when you achieve an important goal by negotiation rather than force or deception.

#### SKEPTIC

The Skeptic believes in an empirical world driven by the clear, predictable laws of science and logic, and he validates this worldview by rebuking claims of spiritual or paranormal phenomena. Supposed "supernatural" events are disdained openly and exposed to the merciless light of reason to show gullible folks the backwardness of their views. Even those Skeptics who have actually witnessed occult phenomena strive to find rational explanations in order to keep their world orderly, safe and sane. Scientists, journalists, scholars and teachers are likely to personify the Skeptic mindset.

— Regain Willpower if you convince another person to believe a scientific, rational explanation for a phenomenon that he believes at first is supernatural.

## STEP TWO: CHOOSE ATTRIBUTES

This process is identical to the manner in which hunter characters acquire Attributes. Allocate six dots to the Traits in your character's primary category, four dots to the secondary category and three dots to the tertiary category. For more details, refer to the Hunter rulebook, pp. 88-89.

## STEP THREE: CHOOSE ABILITIES

Bystanders acquire Abilities in the same manner as the imbued. Allocate 11 dots to the primary Ability category, seven to the secondary category and four dots to the tertiary category. See the Hunter rulebook, pp. 105-119, for a list and description of available Abilities.

## STEP FOUR: CHOOSE ADVANTAGES

You have five points with which to purchase Backgrounds, which help flesh out your character's origins and the means that are available to him during the chronicle. You also get seven points to allocate among the three bystander Virtues: Courage, Reason and Self-Control. Virtues must be rated 1 to 5; your character cannot have a score of zero in any of them before play begins.

## BACKGROUNDS

You may choose Backgrounds for your bystander character from the same list that hunters use (see *Hunter*, pp. 119-125), subject to some restrictions. As always, the Golden Rule applies. Storytellers may choose to modify or ignore these limitations at their discretion, depending on what works best for their chronicles.

Additionally, bystanders (and hunters) may have the new Backgrounds detailed here, or any introduced in the *Hunter* creed books.

#### ARCHIVE

*Jon fumbled with the locks and hurried inside his apartment. "Give me just a second," he said, making his way around the piles of books, papers and trash that filled the front room. "I know it's here somewhere."*

*Jessica stood in the doorway, unable to bring herself to step inside. Only a few thin rays of sunlight made their way into the room between the boards Jon had nailed over the windows. He disappeared down a short hall, and she heard a door open. He was back moments later, carrying a cardboard document box.*

*"Should be in here," he muttered, setting the box on what might have been a table. He pulled off the top and began rifling through the contents. "1960... '59... '58... here!" Jonathan pulled out a thick, paperbound book and rushed to Jessica, flipping pages quickly.*

*"Okay, this is the Who's Who of Asheville from 1958," he said, his eyes scanning the pages. "My mother collected them, and I never got around to throwing them away. Ah! Here we go!" He turned the book around so she could see.*

*The man in the picture wore a tuxedo. The expression on his face bespoke confidence, wealth and authority, but it was undeniably the same man they'd seen hiding in the alley the night before.*

*"Who is he?" she asked.*

*"Lamont Winston Turner, the Third," Jonathan said, both proud and a little unsettled that his memory was correct. "Came from old money. Family used to be prominent here up until about the '70s, when the last Turner died in a car crash." He stared at her, the fear etched plainly on his face. "Lamont supposedly died of a heart attack in 1972," he said. "But we saw him with our own eyes. He's one of them. Now do you believe me?"*

Your character has access to a collection of newspapers, books, magazines or photos moldering away in an attic or basement that he can turn to for information about past events. The data in the archive may be general information, such as newspaper clippings of notable events, or it could be very arcane and specific, such as zoological journals about primates in New Guinea. The exact nature of the collection must be agreed upon with the Storyteller

before play, and the Storyteller is the final arbiter on what information the archive contains. Your character is sufficiently familiar with the archive that he can sort through it for the information he needs within an hour, at most. While the archive is a source of information that's always available, and it can be tailored specifically to your character's needs, the downside is that he has to keep adding to the collection if he wants to keep it current.

- You have a small collection of books or clippings covering events or people from the last five years.
- The archive is a moderate collection of materials taking up a corner of your attic, covering topics going back 10 years.
- Your collection takes up several bookshelves or fills enough boxes to cover an entire wall, and it goes back as far as 25 years.
- The archive fills a spare room of your house or apartment, with a wide variety of related materials that span the last 50 years.
- Museums and private dealers have made periodic offers for your vast collection, which reaches back as far as 100 to 150 years.

#### DESTINY

When bystanders forfeit or reject the imbuing, they alienate themselves from the Heralds and their plans for mankind's future. In a single fateful instant, your character turns his back on the glory — or infamy — that could have awaited him. Players may not purchase the Destiny Background for bystander characters.

#### MENTOR

Many hunters view the lost with varying degrees of pity and outright scorn for not stepping up to the challenge when they saw their first monster. To make matters worse, the majority of bystanders cannot understand the Word, and they have no idea that hunter-net exists. As a result, forging relationships of any kind with the imbued is very difficult. The most likely mentors for the lost are normal people — friends and neighbors who have the wisdom and experience to offer advice, assistance and possibly training in one or more Abilities. A bystander might have a friend who was a Vietnam vet. While he may not know the first thing about monsters, the vet is no stranger to stress, terror or the realities of combat. In rare cases, your character might know another more experienced bystander who can provide guidance. Only a handful of the lost are fortunate enough to win the respect and assistance of an actual hunter. Given these parameter changes for the Background compared to its definition in *Hunter*, the following rating descriptions apply for bystanders.

- Your mentor is capable of training you in one or two Abilities and offering some useful advice.
- Your mentor is moderately influential and connected, and he can offer advice and assistance that is helpful in a variety of situations.
- Your mentor is a fellow bystander who was changed a short while before you were.
- Your mentor is an experienced bystander with a considerable degree of experience, resources and skill.
- Your mentor is a recently imbued hunter who has a small degree of insight, contacts and experience.

#### PATRON

It's uncommon to be contacted more than once by the Heralds, even among the imbued. Generally, a hunter awakes, then his "benefactors" move on, leaving him to arrive at his own conclusions about who he is and what he should do with his newfound awareness. The Messengers have even less time for those who are shown the way but who fail to respond. Bystanders may not have the Patron Background, but they may choose the Flaw: *Haunted*, detailed in the Merits and Flaws section later in this chapter.

#### STEEL NERVES

See *Hunter Book: Judge*, p. 73. It's theoretically possible that a bystander could be particularly resistant to the horrific sights of a monstrous world. Maybe he's seen a lot of human abuse, so he isn't surprised that *inhuman* things are just as capable of it. Possession of this Background doesn't immunize him against the need for Virtue rolls, or to the loss of Conviction, but it does help him resist the acquisition of short-term derangements. (In particular, those that might be gained from truly horrific experiences, such as being forced to kill a friend.) Characters cannot use this Background to resist mental ailments acquired from a dangerously low Conviction rating.

## STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

At this point, all that remains is to record your character's starting Conviction of 10 and his starting Willpower of 3, then you may spend 21 freebie points to increase any of his Traits according to the point costs listed on the "Freebie Point Costs" chart (p. 53). Additionally, you may trade freebie points for Merits and Flaws to individualize your character further, if the Storyteller permits.

#### MERITS & FLAWS

The imbuing is both a nightmarish exposure to the supernatural and a test of will. No two people experience the ordeal in quite the same way. Some face the moment of truth and accept a burden that

they understand only dimly. Others turn away, haunted forever after by the memories of what they witnessed. Then there are those who fall somewhere in between, who hear the call but falter at the crucial moment and come away with mere fragments of the power intended for them.

Bystanders may have Merits and Flaws, if the Storyteller permits. Merits and Flaws are additional qualities that round out a character's identity. Hunters and bystanders are subject to the same point limits and rules that apply to all Merits and Flaws, as detailed in Chapter 3.

In addition to the general Traits that are available, the Storyteller may allow bystander characters (not genuine hunter characters) to possess the following unique Merits and Flaws. The imbuing is a sudden infusion of intense otherworldly power, and it's theoretically possible for an individual to be partially changed even if she fails to answer the call. Essentially, some bystanders may be capable of effects associated with hunters' second sight and related abilities. This possibility gives you and the Storyteller the option to experiment with creating characters and chronicles of varying power levels. A bystander should possess no more than one of each of these Merits and Flaws.

#### **SUPERNATURAL AFFINITY (1-PT MERIT)**

Your exposure to monsters has left a deep and abiding impression on your subconscious, and it is perhaps a source of nightmares and anxieties that have plagued you ever since. Although the thought of monsters hiding amongst humanity fills you with dread, you are morbidly obsessed with the idea. It's like a raw wound that's terrible to look at, yet you can't stop picking at it. You're somehow drawn unconsciously to a specific kind of monster — probably the same variety that you encountered at your failed imbuing (assuming you can even recognize different monsters as the "same kind").

This Merit causes you to sense intuitively the immediate presence of a particular kind of monster. This type of entity becomes the focus of your attention for reasons that may not be immediately obvious, although you may certainly learn over time to associate sudden, inexplicable feelings with the proximity of the creature. The exact nature of the attraction is for you and your Storyteller to determine, and it should be consistent each time you encounter the object of your affinity. You may feel anxiety, outright terror or even desire, depending on what you saw and what happened in your first encounter.

This quality does not apply when monsters use supernatural powers to conceal themselves. You still

don't know they're present. Spirits, however, can be detected even when they're invisible to mortal sight.

#### **THE WORD (1-PT MERIT)**

This Merit allows you to recognize, understand and write the hunter code just as the imbued can.

#### **PENETRATE ILLUSION (1-TO 3-PT MERIT)**

The Heralds' harsh revelation about the existence of monsters has left you with a paranoid distrust of appearances, no matter how ordinary or appealing. This fixation, combined with the energies of the imbuing, has given you a limited ability to see past the illusions that some monsters create for their victims.

Penetrating a supernatural illusion requires a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6). You may not defeat illusions of a higher order than the number of points spent on this Merit. Spending one point on this Merit allows you to penetrate common, low-level illusions. Two points allow you to penetrate uncommon, medium-level illusions. Three points allow you to attempt to see past powerful illusory effects. (See the *Hunter Storytellers Companion* for comparative levels of illusion types for various kinds of monsters.)

Note that this capability does not reveal spirits that do not make themselves visible in the material world. (Nor does it automatically reveal spirits that possess living bodies or items.) However, it does allow you to attempt to penetrate any illusions that ghosts create (bleeding walls, illusory flames). It can also allow you to see monsters that try to use supernatural powers to remain hidden.

If you use this Merit to penetrate a monster's illusion, you may still be required to spend a Willpower point to have the resolve to remain at the scene and under control, thanks to hardened spirit. You probably have to make a Virtue roll to avoid losing a Conviction point, as well. After all, you were exposed to an illusion of fire, for example — a completely unnatural phenomenon. You may have seen through the ruse, but its occurrence still defies your understanding of the mundane world.

Likewise, *Penetrate Illusion* allows you to detect a monster that's cloaked by invisibility or other illusion. A monster is still revealed. You may have to spend Willpower to resist the supernatural fear inspired, and you might have to make a Virtue roll to retain Conviction during the spectacle.

#### **THE SIGHT (1-TO 3-PT MERIT)**

Your brief contact with the Heralds has opened your eyes to the supernatural, and now you see monsters wherever you turn, like it or not. As with hunters' second sight, this quality allows you

to sense monsters for what they really are, although you get no information as to their specific nature. You get an undeniable feeling that someone or something is simply *inhuman* or *wrong* when you look at it, without any idea of why or how. A being may look perfectly normal, but you just know it's not right.

Unlike hunters' second sight, this Merit does not allow you to see through supernatural illusions, nor does it make you immune to supernatural emotion-, mind- or body-control powers. You're just as vulnerable to fear, magical hallucinations and illusions as any other bystander is. If a monster uses supernatural powers to conceal its location, you cannot see or sense it. Nor can you see spirits that don't manifest intentionally or reveal themselves in the material world, but you can sense that a possession victim is off somehow.

Any immunity to monstrous influence or control must still be acquired by spending a Willpower point.

The variable cost of this Merit dictates how much control you have over your sight. At one point, your sight is always active. You are subjected to horrific sights day and night, requiring frequent Virtue rolls to maintain your grip on sanity. Two points provide some degree of control. You can activate the sight intentionally, but it also activates spontaneously in the presence of a specific kind of monster, most likely the same kind that you first encountered at your abortive imbuing. Three points allow almost complete control over the sight.

Regardless of whether you spend two or three points, activating and deactivating the sight requires a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6).

#### CANNOT BECOME A MONSTER (3-PT MERIT)

Although you did not accept the powers offered by the Messengers, your spirit was still altered profoundly: You are now as immune to monsters' corrupting touch as any of the imbued. You cannot be blood bound or turned into a ghoul. Nor may you ever become a mage or use hedge magic. Attempts to transform you into a vampire kill you immediately. Finally, once dead, you cannot rise again as a zombie or spirit. (*The Hunter Storytellers Companion* states how you are immune to becoming the supernatural, just as the chosen are.)

The Storyteller remains the final arbiter as to whether this quality is effective against the transforming powers of especially ancient or potent monsters. One might still make a vampire of you, for example.

Note that this Merit does not immunize you to the emotion-, mind- or body-control powers of monsters. You still need to spend Willpower to resist those effects.

#### RESISTANT TO SUPERNATURAL FEAR (3-PT MERIT)

Your attempted imbuing confronted you with nightmarish sights that might have broken the sanity of a lesser person. Having endured the intense experience, you are now more resistant to supernaturally induced terror and confusion than even other bystanders. You may resist supernaturally induced fear (see the "Monsters and the Human Mind" sidebar, p. 51) with a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6) instead of being forced to spend a Willpower point. This ability is reflexive. If the roll succeeds, you enjoy hardened spirit's protection for the remainder of the scene. If the roll fails, you are vulnerable to mortal fear, and you probably go into hysterics and flee. You can, however, still opt to spend a Willpower point after a failed roll. Botching a roll means that no Willpower can be spent, and the Storyteller may assign you a temporary or permanent derangement.

Making a successful Willpower roll to resist supernaturally induced fear does not preclude you from making Virtue rolls or losing Conviction points in the scene.

**Note:** This Merit may not work against very old or powerful monsters. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty of your Willpower roll or decide that the Trait has no effect at all against particularly potent creatures.

#### RESISTANT TO MIND CONTROL (4-PT MERIT)

Your traumatic brush with the Messengers has left you violently opposed to the idea of another mind forcing itself upon you. You can wall off your mind and body from invading forces better than other bystanders can.

This Merit allows you to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to resist any direct possession or mind-control attempts. Supernaturally induced fear, as described in the "Monsters and the Human Mind" sidebar, does not meet special resistance from this Trait. Nor does this Merit allow you the capacity to see through supernatural illusions or hallucinations.

Your Willpower roll is reflexive. You can resist control attempts whether you are aware of them or not, as can other bystanders. A successful roll grants you protection as per the hardened spirit effect for the remainder of the scene. If your roll fails, you can still spend a Willpower point to resist. If you have no Willpower to spend, or you choose not to, you are subject to monstrous influence for the scene. Botching results in the same. Influence may persist even longer if the creature is subtle, maintaining control over you that you are not even aware of. However, with this Merit, you are liberated automatically from ongoing control with the next Willpower roll that you make with this Merit, or with the next Willpower

point that you spend toward hardened spirit. Such subtle, extended monster influence is not simply suspended for a scene — it's severed completely. (Breaking a monster's hold in this way cannot be performed in the same scene that control is achieved, however, even if you make another Willpower roll or spend a point right away. Control can be severed in the next scene or later if you do not call upon Willpower again for some time.)

Making a successful Willpower roll to resist mind- or body-control powers does not spare you from making Virtue rolls or losing Conviction points in the scene.

Note: This Merit may not work against very old or powerful monsters. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty of your Willpower roll or decide that the Trait has no effect at all against particularly potent creatures.

#### HAGGARD APPEARANCE (1-PT FLAW)

The constant stress and fear that hounds you in the wake of your failed imbuing has left its mark both physically and mentally. Loss of sleep, loss of appetite and relentless paranoia have caused you to lose a dramatic amount of weight, and you bear your burden poorly. You look 10 years older than you are. Your eyes are dead, or they gleam with an almost feverish light, and your hair might have started to fall out or go white prematurely. The effect is deeply unsettling, especially to those who knew you before. Even total strangers react to you uneasily.

Your physical features are permanently marked by your experiences, resulting in a countenance that is deeply disturbing to those around you. Your Appearance decreases permanently by one, and it cannot increase with experience points or through the application of a hunter's edge. Additionally, the difficulty of all your Social-related rolls increases by one.

#### HAUNTED (1-, 3- OR 5-PT FLAW)

When you didn't earn a proper imbuing, you might have turned your back on a crucial role for the good of mankind, or you might have come within a heartbeat of heeding the call, only to be thwarted by nothing more than an accident of fate. And yet the Messengers have not forgotten you. Whether they mean to lead you to your destiny or punish you for your indecision, you are haunted by the enigmatic beings.

Unlike the vast majority of the imbued, who seem to be contacted by the Heralds at their imbuing alone, you are still assailed by frightening sights and disturbing messages, similar to your own harrowing experiences at the imbuing. The frequency and intensity of these encounters depends on the number of Flaw points you take. One point means you're contacted infrequently, perhaps only when

you are in the physical presence of a monster, at which point, you are shown the creature's true nature and urged to act. Three points indicate daily contact. You suffer frequent nightmares or hallucinations that force you to witness the depredations of monsters in your neighborhood. Five points inflict nearly constant torment. You hear the Heralds' whispers and endure horrific visions nearly every waking moment.

Whenever you're subjected to assaults on your sanity, you may be required to make a Virtue roll at the Storyteller's discretion. Or your actions could suffer a difficulty increase when you are afflicted: +1, +2 or +3 for the one-point, three-point or five-point Flaws, respectively. (And the Heralds rarely choose a good time to make their intentions known.) It might be possible to pacify the Messengers and at least lessen the severity of their visitations by obliging their apparent will, depending on the Storyteller's plans for your chronicle.

#### HUNTED (1- OR 4-PT FLAW)

You might wish that you could forget about the sights you witnessed at the imbuing, but the monster you saw has other plans. The creature is determined to hunt you down and destroy you, either because of a perceived need for revenge or simply out of self-preservation. Whatever its reasons are, the monster is implacable. It cannot be negotiated with or pacified. It will not rest until you are dead.

The number of points invested in this Flaw determines the power and diligence of the monster in question. The one-point version indicates a relatively weak monster, or a moderately powerful one that pursues you when it's convenient. The four-point version suggests a powerful and resourceful monster that considers you a loose end that needs to be tied, or it indicates a moderately powerful creature that spends every active moment stalking and planning your demise. Even if the monster is eventually destroyed, it might have allies or servants who continue the vendetta.

#### NERVOUS CONDITION (2-PT FLAW)

The trauma of your exposure to the supernatural has left deep mental scars. The damage manifests as chronic physical ailments that haunt your everyday life. You suffer muscle tremors and nervous tension that affects even the most routine tasks.

Your hands and feet tremble almost constantly, increasing in severity when you are under stress. The difficulty of all Dexterity-based actions rises by one. In times of significant stress, the penalty can be up to three, at the Storyteller's discretion. Additionally, you react very poorly to sudden shocks, imposing a +1 difficulty to all actions when you are

surprised. If you are already stressed, and then surprised, the penalties can be cumulative.

#### BROKEN HEALTH (3-PT FLAW)

The revelations wrought by the Heralds are extremely traumatic, subjecting the human heart and mind to a burden that some individuals are simply unable to endure. Your health has suffered enormously, causing you to lose weight, strength and vitality that may never be regained.

Your Stamina decreases permanently to 2, and it cannot increase with experience points or improve by the application of a hunter's edges. Additionally, the difficulty of all Stamina-based rolls increases by one.

#### NEMESIS (3-TO 5-PT FLAW)

Many people are imbued alone, faced with making a crucial decision with no one else to turn to for support. Sometimes more than one person hears the call, however, or a bystander's eyes are opened when he is caught in the crossfire between a monster and a group of existing hunters. You were awoken in the presence of others, and because you hesitated, the monster was able to turn the tables on the hunters. One of the surviving imbued resents or hates you. He might blame you for the death of his comrades or for the monster's escape, or simply for reasons known only to his own fevered mind, but he has vowed to take revenge for your "cowardice."

You are being stalked by one of the imbued. The number of points invested in this Flaw determines the relative power and/or diligence of the imbued in question. The hunter's ultimate objectives are up to the Storyteller, but he is determined to make you pay for your inaction. He might desire a face-to-face showdown, or he might go after your family. He cannot be placated, but some form of redress might be possible in time, if you are willing to pay the hunter's price.

## THE PRELUDE

Once your character has been created, it's up to you and your Storyteller to work out the details of his prelude — when he is contacted by the Messengers and receives the revelation that forever changes his life. The prelude is very important because it gives you a chance to flesh out the final details of your character, such as the exact circumstances of his failed imbuing and his all-important inaction. Also, it gives you a chance to make final alterations to your character before play if you're dissatisfied with the way you allocated dots.

The prelude is basically a short game session in which you and the Storyteller become acquainted with your character and build up to his

awakening. The best way is to begin with your character proceeding through the mundane events of his life: going to work, interacting with friends, spending time with parents or family. The more you play through the everyday pleasures and pains of his life, the more you develop a feel for the way he acts and reacts to typical situations. All the while, the Storyteller works behind the scenes, planning your character's confrontation with the supernatural.

The revelation always comes as a shock, a bolt from the blue. Your character might be in a grocery store when the lights suddenly flicker. He hears a voice saying, "THE DEAD DO NOT REST." He looks around for the source, and he sees a man at the end of the aisle in between flashes of fluorescent light. His face is gray as a corpse. Maggots writhe across his swollen purple lips. The very sight violates everything that your character knows and understands about the world. And the thing looks directly into your character's eyes....

At this crucial point, you need to bring everything you've developed about your character to bear. Naturally, your first instinct as a player is to take action, but what would your character do? Would he freeze, unable to accept the terrifying sight? Would he throw down his groceries and run? Would he yell for help? Be brutally honest. Real people aren't generally gung-ho heroes. If you have a hard time deciding, let that be your answer. Your character is caught so thoroughly off-guard that he can't decide what to do until it's too late.

If you honestly believe that your character would leap at this hideous, walking corpse, that's fine. The Storyteller might step in at this point and say that by the time you can find something to use as a weapon, the creature is gone, or one of the store employees comes around the corner and intervenes when he sees you trying to attack a "nice old man."

The important thing is that your character fails the test, whether you planned it that way in advance or it just happens that way in the heat of the moment. Your character may not recognize his failure at first or for a while. But in time, as events and guilt weigh on him and things seem to just be wrong about the world, he knows that something has changed — and he's a part of it.

How your character reacts, both during the revelation and after, says a lot about his goals and motivations concerning monsters and any subsequent dealings he may have with bystanders or imbued. In the aftermath of the revelation, you may want to consider the following questions and how they apply to your character.

- Did he freeze? Was your character paralyzed by fear or indecision? If he is normally the sort of person who handles crises decisively, how does this critical failure affect him? Does he seek out other monsters in an effort to expiate his apparent weakness, or does it shatter his confidence and leave him haunted by self-recriminations and doubt? How can he recover from such feelings?

- Did he take action, only to be brushed aside? The monster treated your character's best efforts as though he were a child. Would that make him furious or fearful? Would he conceal his failure in order to hide his shame, or would he not have expected to accomplish much in the first place?

- Were defenseless people injured or killed? Does he blame himself for not doing anything to prevent a tragedy? Does he feel compelled to take revenge or to relieve himself of a burden of guilt? Does the violence leave him bitter and cynical about the hopelessness of opposing monsters?

- Was he the only person touched by the Heralds? As far as your character knows, he is the only person on Earth who knows monsters are real. How does he handle the possibility? Does he try to talk to others about what he's seen, go into hiding or try to fight a one-man crusade?

- Were hunters changed at the same time? Does your character feel that he somehow failed where others were found worthy? Does he believe that he can validate himself, or is such bravado irrelevant? Does he view hunters as somehow superior to himself because of their thorough change, or does he resent the unfairness of the test?

Answer these kinds of questions, and your bystander's existence in a world populated by monsters begins. The following character templates hopefully help you create such characters quickly, allowing you to jump into a **Hunter** game as a one of the lost. Feel free to adapt these characters to your tastes.

#### HUNTERS VERSUS BYSTANDERS

It might seem that bystanders, as essentially regular people without any special sight, capabilities or defenses, are more of a detriment than a benefit to full-fledged imbued. If the lost can't see the *things* right before them, they'll just be killed (or worse, used as hostages) while the efforts of more capable hunters are impeded or undermined. It's not too difficult to see why some imbued are so quick to dismiss and even criticize bystanders.

And yet, bystanders have one strength that no prudent hunter can overlook: *Bystanders know the truth*. They're aware that monsters exist. They know that the world that everyone else sees is a fallacy. They realize that something has to be done if life is going to be lived at all. Compared to the docile, ignorant masses, that knowledge makes bystanders invaluable allies for the imbued.

Hunters and bystanders' mutual knowledge is what makes them work together as partners, supporters and comrades. That mutual knowledge is what makes the imbued and lost work together among players in the same troupe. Characters and players can't afford to do without each other. Once you make that realization, you'll want to find ways to make bystanders effective contributors to the hunt, and bystanders' players active members of your game, rather than just sideline second-stringers.

Bystanders can help hunters by doing research that the imbued are incapable of by lack of education, time or resources. The lost may not always be able to stand in the presence of a man-beast and hold their ground, but they can investigate myths and folklore about such creatures in hopes of finding their weaknesses. Bystanders with the right connections might be able to discover that a woman named Dina Greer has actually lived under a string of false names and has in fact existed for over 150 years. The lost are often trained and knowledgeable people, just as imbued are. Their talents and capabilities can be invaluable on the hunt. A bystander with medical skills can patch up a dying hunter when his fellow imbued would otherwise watch their partner bleed to death. A dud might not be able to see a ghost, but he can be waiting behind the wheel of a get-away car while hunters stage a raid on a haunted house. One of the lost can also be just as effective as a hunter is when he's staring over the sights of a rifle.

Bystanders' possible roles on the hunt are endless, so when a player chooses to roleplay one — or simply discovers that his character has become one — be sure to make your friend an active part of the game. Don't squeeze him and his character out because they "can't make a contribution." You might discover the hard way just how important their role is when your own character is friendless and alone.

# FORMER SKINHEAD

*There's evil in the world, man. Trust me, I've been there.*

**Prelude:** There was never a question about whether you would join the Brotherhood. Your father and your uncles were members like their father before them. The first memories you have are of sitting in your father's lap at rallies, learning how to raise your arm in salute of the uniformed man on the stage. You didn't understand the words, but you were told how white people were in danger of being driven extinct by "mongrel" Jews and blacks. Reverend Miles, the leader of the Brotherhood, called you a "paladin of the white race." At five, you stood before the crowd and swore to protect your mother and sisters from corruption, to join in the battle to save America.

As you grew older, you attended rallies and marched in towns across the South and Midwest. You got in your first fight at the age of 10, when a bunch of blacks and black-lovers interfered with a demonstration in Mississippi. You managed to knock down a black man with a pipe. The Reverend himself called you a hero. From then on, you jumped at every opportunity to use your fists or cause destruction in the name of white pride.

By the time you were nearly 18, you had a juvenile record four pages long, and you were one of the rising stars of the Brotherhood. There was talk that the Reverend wanted to make you one of his Chosen Men. When your 18th birthday came, you thought it would be the greatest day of your life. There would be a special rally, and you would be made a knight, a soldier in the service of the white race.

Everything seemed perfect, right up to the point when you climbed the stage

to accept the Reverend's blessing. Then, with the fire of a hundred torches blazing around you, the voice of God resounded in your mind saying, "HE WEARS A CLOAK OF LIES."

The Reverend was standing with his hand outstretched, beaming with pride. Only now his skin was gray and withered, his fingers curled into claws. The look in his eyes was pure poison, and the mocking twist of his black lips revealed how he'd deceived you and everyone else.

Your mind screamed, *do something*, but the shock of the revelation left you immobile. Then in the blink of an eye, everything seemed normal again—except for the Reverend's eyes. The poisonous gleam was still there. You couldn't believe you'd never seen it before. From that day forward, you swore you'd never be fooled again.

**Concept:** You've been fed a steady diet of hate, thinly disguised as "Christian duty." Now you know who the real monsters are and how you've served their purposes for years. Filled with anger and shame, you're determined to redeem yourself and make the monsters pay.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Despite having rejected everything you were taught, you are still a product of your upbringing. You're forceful and outspoken, accustomed to confrontations and conditioned to brutality. Ironically, your experience with the supremacists gives you an interesting perspective on the imbued and their extreme attitudes toward monsters.

**Equipment:** leather jacket, wife-beater shirt, faded jeans and steel-toed boots, numerous white-pride and Nazi tattoos



# THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: BELIEVER

PLAYER:

CONCEPT: REFORMED THUG

DEMEANOR: BRAVO

## ATTRIBUTES

### PHYSICAL

Strength	● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity(Fast Reflexes)	● ● ● ● ○
Stamina	● ● ● ○ ○

### SOCIAL

Charisma	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Manipulation	● ● ○ ○ ○
Appearance	● ● ○ ○ ○

### MENTAL

Perception	● ● ● ○ ○
Intelligence	● ● ○ ○ ○
Wits	● ● ○ ○ ○

## ABILITIES

### TALENTS

Alertness	● ● ○ ○ ○
Athletics	● ● ○ ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	● ● ○ ○ ○
Dodge	● ● ○ ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	● ● ● ○ ○
Intuition	● ● ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	● ● ● ○ ○
Melee	● ● ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ● ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

Academics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bureaucracy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	● ● ○ ○ ○
Law	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## ADVANTAGES

### BACKGROUNDS

Arsenal	● ● ● ○ ○
Contacts	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources	● ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### MERITS & FLAWS

NAME	RATING
	1 X
	2 X
	3 X
	4
	5

### VIRTUES

COURAGE	REASON	SELF-CONTROL
1 X	1 X	1 X
2 X	2 X	2 X
3 X	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5

## DERANGEMENTS


## CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

## EXPERIENCE

## HEALTH

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

We're going to fight this decision. We'll have rallies and get petitions signed and do whatever we have to.

**Prelude:** High school was torture for you. You were loud-mouthed and opinionated, and since your opinions weren't the same as the cool kids', you quickly established yourself as a loner. You hung around in the library, reading *New Internationalist* magazines. You attended geeks' clubs because they couldn't afford to ostracize the only girl in the group. You didn't go to the prom.

Fortunately, college was nothing like high school. When you started spouting off, not only did people actually listen and agree, you were invited to join active political societies — and you liked it. You were accepted and encouraged for the first time. Soon you were organizing meetings, rallies and protests. You were going to change the world!

Yet, when the opportunity to make a difference actually arose, you were paralyzed.

You were on a night out with a few girls who were desperate to get you off campus for a change. The idea didn't thrill you, but you needed their support in the next student-union election. Your friends had agreed to meet up with a group of guys. You didn't know them, but one struck you as weird right away. You couldn't put a finger on it until you were at a restaurant and you swear one of the items on the menu was "DEATH." When you looked up, confused and shocked, you realized that the guy was dead, or at least dead inside. He never even noticed that you sensed the truth. He was too busy putting moves on one of the girls.



You knew you had to do something. After all the years of protesting and making noise, here was your chance to make a personal difference. But you didn't know what to do. How do you protest something that simply can't be? Panicking and ashamed, you threw out some lame excuse for leaving and rushed back to your dorm.

Your friend was found dead the next day. Everyone offered their condolences and told you how lucky you were that you'd come back when you did. All you felt was regret, shame and helplessness. Somehow, simple protests and rallies didn't mean much when there were worse injustices and things at work in the world. If only you could see them again, you'd do something about them. But if you never saw another, wouldn't that mean you'd failed again?

**Concept:** You've fought for all kinds of causes, from the plight of the Third World to the protection of endangered species, but always from a comfortable distance.

When it really mattered, you failed to contribute. Now how can you make up for your mistake and prove that all those years weren't wasted?

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're a passionate person, but a paranoid one. You've seen firsthand that security and safety are lies. That realization alone is grounds for another cause. But if you draw attention to whatever's out there, don't you draw its attention to you? Are you truly dedicated or just a hypocrite?

**Equipment:** student card, mace, ballpoint pen and 240 signatures so far

# WINTER THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: REBEL

PLAYER:

CONCEPT: RABBLE ROUSER

DEMEANOR: FANATIC

## ATTRIBUTES

### PHYSICAL

Strength	● ● ○ ○ ○
Dexterity	● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina	● ● ● ○ ○

### SOCIAL

Charisma	● ● ○ ○ ○
Manipulation	● ● ● ○ ○
Appearance	● ● ○ ○ ○

### MENTAL

Perception	● ● ○ ○ ○
Intelligence	● ● ● ○ ○
Wits	● ● ● ○ ○

## ABILITIES

### TALENTS

Alertness	● ● ○ ○ ○
Athletics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge	● ● ● ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	● ● ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts (Candle-making)	● ● ● ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ● ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

Academics (Philosophy)	● ● ○ ○ ○
Bureaucracy	● ● ● ○ ○
Computer	● ● ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	● ● ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	● ● ● ○ ○
Research	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## ADVANTAGES

### BACKGROUNDS

Allies	● ● ○ ○ ○
Contacts	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Fame	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources	● ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### MERITS & FLAWS

NAME	RATING
	1 X
	2 X
	3 X
	4
	5

### VIRTUES

COURAGE	REASON	SELF-CONTROL
1 X	1 X	1 X
2 X	2 X	2 X
3 X	3 X	3 X
4	4	4
5	5	5

## DERANGEMENTS

## CONVICTION

## HEALTH



Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If I see any funny stuff, you better get the fuck out of here before I beat the shit out of you!*

**Prelude:** Your childhood wasn't exceptional, but it was safe and secure. You grew up in a lower-middle-class family with three brothers and a sister. Family meant everything to you. Sure, your parents yelled a lot, and one morning Mom yelled all the way to her car and drove off, but she was back to eat the dinner your sister cooked. Those strong relationships helped you cope when you flunked most subjects and dropped out of high school.

It wasn't too long until you were back on your feet with a job as a security guard for a large company. You'd always been big, and the new boss was impressed with your people skills. So you ran the rounds, opening doors for employees, pointing the way for visiting suits and kicking the shit out of punks with spray cans now and then.

But that all changed one night. Some suit drove up, asking you to open the office at night. You didn't know him, so you called up to your boss who was working late. He gave the okay. But as the guy went in, everything went deathly quiet and a voice came over your walkie-talkie. It said, "IT DOES NOT BELONG." Suddenly scared out of your wits, you looked over at the distant suit who was bone white and just as thin.

You abandoned your post and ran up the stairs while he took the elevator. He must have been there to meet your boss. When you got to the right floor, it was too late. You heard a stifled scream. When you looked through the small window in the door, you saw your boss, out to meet the visitor

in the lobby, his arm broken and dangling — and the stranger's arm *in your boss' mouth up to the elbow!* You stood staring, sweating and immovable. Your mind screamed to do something. You imagined yourself bashing the thing with your flashlight, but your body just wouldn't respond.

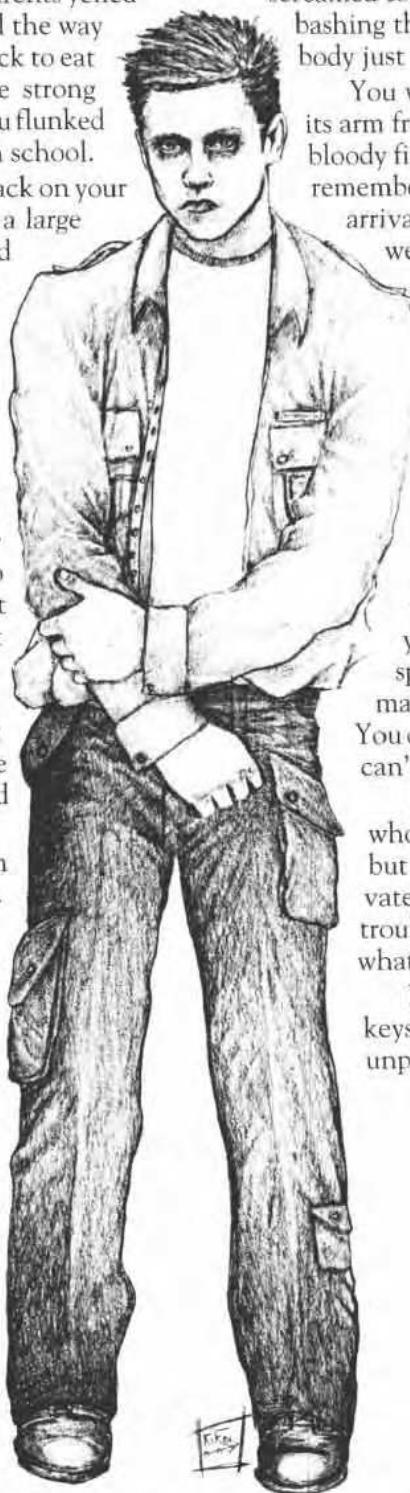
You watched as the "visitor" finally pulled its arm free and turned nonchalantly to press a bloody finger to the elevator button. You don't remember hearing the "ding" of the elevator's arrival. The next thing you remember, you were in your car, driving blindly. You didn't know where you were going. You didn't care. You were there that night. You saw what happened. If you hadn't left your post, you might be dead now, too.

They know who you are. All you can do is run.

**Concept:** You're on the road, searching for safety, but there's no telling where to find it. You can't see things — not since that night — but you get glimpses that send chills up your spine. Maybe you're imagining it, or maybe there really are things out there. You don't care. They can't catch you if they can't find you.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're a big guy who does his best not to show weakness, but you're really a broken man. Fear motivates your every action, and you have trouble looking people in the eye for fear of what you might see.

**Equipment:** the pistol you used at work, keys to locks that are miles away, a trail of unpaid bar tabs



# WINTER THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: SURVIVOR

PLAYER:

CONCEPT: TORMENTED TOUGH GUY

DEMEANOR: BRAVO

## ATTRIBUTES

### PHYSICAL

Strength (Iron grip) ● ● ● ● ○  
 Dexterity ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Stamina (Enduring) ● ● ● ○ ○

### SOCIAL

Charisma ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Manipulation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Appearance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### MENTAL

Perception (Sudden motion) ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Intelligence ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Wits ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## ABILITIES

### TALENTS

Alertness ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Athletics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Awareness ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Brawl ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Dodge ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Empathy ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Expression ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Intimidation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Intuition ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Leadership ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Streetwise ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Subterfuge ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### SKILLS

Animal Ken ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Demolitions ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Drive ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Etiquette ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Firearms ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Melee ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Performance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Security ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Stealth ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Survival ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Technology ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Bureaucracy ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Computer ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Finance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Investigation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Law ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Linguistics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Research ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## ADVANTAGES

### BACKGROUNDS

Arsenal ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Contacts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Database ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 Resources ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### MERITS & FLAWS

NAME	RATING	COURAGE	REASON	SELF-CONTROL
	1 X	1 X	1 X	
	2 X	2 X	2 X	
	3	3 X	3 X	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	

### VIRTUES

### DERANGEMENTS

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

— WILLPOWER —  
 ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

— EXPERIENCE —  
 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### HEALTH

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

*Now, that's a fantastic deal. But wait! There's more!*

**Prelude:** People joked that you could talk underwater, so you tried it as a gimmick on your show. They also said you could sell ice to an Eskimo. You haven't tried that yet, but you will if someone fronts the plane fare. When it comes to the show, you'll try anything and sell anything.

Your childhood was marked by loving parents, average grades and being bullied by other kids — a lot. Maybe you got beat up because you always had something to say, or maybe you would have been beaten up a lot more if you weren't able to talk your way out of most confrontations. Even if other kids did beat the crap out of you, you always had a comeback or insult ready. There was one kid — Ricky — whom you particularly hated. He always harassed you no matter (or because of) how bad you always made him look.

Eventually, you graduated high school and got a job with a local TV studio as a boom operator. Your wit caught the attention of directors, producers and then executives, who gave you a try-out as the host of a kids' show. You had charisma, but your style appealed more to adults than kids. So you transitioned over to a home-shopping channel where your career took off. It started out tediously, but you struggled to be allowed more freedom. Before long, people tuned in to watch you — and that meant they saw the product.

The TV world was becoming your oyster... until the day you saw Ricky again. But he died back in school.

You were at your high-school reunion, sitting at your table, bored with the proceedings. The prom king was giving some speech when you swear you heard him pause and say in no uncertain terms, "THE

MURDERER STANDS BEFORE YOU." You looked up, startled, and immediately recognized a bloody, gaunt, ghostly Ricky standing to the side of the stage, watching the aging prom king with hate vibrant in his unliving eyes. In that moment, the past made sense. Ricky may have bullied you for years, but he was apparently a victim of the same. Maybe he lashed out at you to vent the same that he suffered. And yet, he never *killed* you, whereas the prom king's abuse apparently knew no bounds — and was covered up thoroughly.

You sat stunned as you watched Ricky near the stage. Apparently you were the only one who saw him. For once, you were speechless. That, or maybe it was just easier to hide in the glass in front of you than accept — or do anything about — what you saw.

**Concept:** You're host of a home-shopping show, and you've recently had a brush with the inexplicable. You may have averted your eyes that night, whether out of fear, pride or a lingering hatred, but the guilt you've suffered since has been punishing you. You've found excuses to go by the old school in hopes of seeing Ricky again. You don't know what you'll do if you ever find him, assuming you can.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Words are still your defense mechanism, even now. You make your living by them, and they help you maintain a comfortable distance between yourself and other people. And yet, memories of what you saw that night still leave you speechless. That thought frightens you almost as much as what you saw.

**Equipment:** set of steak knives, collectible coins, pager, miniature tape recorder



# HUNTER

## THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: TRICKSTER

PLAYER:

CONCEPT: CELEBRITY

DEMEANOR: GALLANT

### ATTRIBUTES

#### PHYSICAL

Strength	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Dexterity	● ● ● ○ ○
Stamina	● ● ○ ○ ○

#### SOCIAL

Charisma	● ● ● ○ ○
Manipulation	(Exaggeration)
Appearance	● ● ● ○ ○

#### MENTAL

Perception	● ● ○ ○ ○
Intelligence	● ● ○ ○ ○
Wits (Quick Answers)	● ● ● ○ ○

### ABILITIES

#### TALENTS

Alertness	● ● ● ○ ○
Athletics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy	● ● ● ○ ○
Expression (Public Speaking)	● ● ● ● ○
Intimidation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	● ● ○ ○ ○

#### SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	● ● ● ○ ○
Firearms	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance (Stage Presence)	● ● ● ● ○
Security	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### KNOWLEDGES

Academics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bureaucracy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	● ● ○ ○ ○
Investigation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### ADVANTAGES

#### BACKGROUNDS

Allies	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Contacts	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Fame	● ● ○ ○ ○
Resources	● ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### MERITS & FLAWS

NAME	RATING

#### VIRTUES

COURAGE	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REASON	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SELF-CONTROL	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	3 <input type="checkbox"/>		3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		3 <input type="checkbox"/>
	4 <input type="checkbox"/>		4 <input type="checkbox"/>		4 <input type="checkbox"/>
	5 <input type="checkbox"/>		5 <input type="checkbox"/>		5 <input type="checkbox"/>

### DERANGEMENTS


### CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### HEALTH

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

### EXPERIENCE

*Just one of the boys.*

**Prelude:** When you were just a baby, your mother picked you up, gave you to your father and said, "Here." Then she drove off and never came back.

You never really learned much more about your mother. Dad said they met at a car race, though, so maybe you wound up like her, after all. Dad did his best to raise you right. He invited your aunt over a lot so you'd have a female role model, and he even tried to read a few books on the subject. But in the end, you still found yourself tossing baseballs or footballs, and you even wound up working at his welding shop as a teenager. (You were the secretary, but still....) You always found that jeans fit better than skirts, anyway.

When you graduated high school, you went to college for a Dramatic Arts degree, and you got a job working at a bar. As a customer, you'd caught the attention of the bar's owner while sitting near a bunch of construction workers. When one of them apologized for the group's language, you cheerfully replied, "No fucking problem," and struck up a conversation. The owner offered you work before the night was out.

You were at work when it happened. One of the regulars, a trucker, came in with one of the local lot-lizards. You served them for a couple hours as he got drunk, while she kept nursing the same drink. They finally got up to leave, and you swear the music on the jukebox changed lyrics and pitch to say, "THE DEAD FEED." You looked around confused, and no one but one guy at the bar seemed to notice. You looked at each other strangely, and then you realized that the prostitute headed to the door was just *wrong* — not a person, but a thing. Your

gasp turned the head of the other guy. Whereas you stood astonished, he got up and ran out the door.

Still, you had to know what happened, and you went to the window. You saw the guy separate the trucker and thing where they leaned together against a building. To anyone else's eyes, this was a lovers' quarrel. But you knew better when the "woman" raised a hand and clawed at the intruder, the trucker collapsed to the ground, and the woman simply disappeared.

Your life changed that night. When the guy at the bar came in again a few nights later, looking your way nervously, you knew you had to talk things through. Turns out he'd seen other things since, and he could do some weird stuff that he couldn't explain. You didn't know about doing weird things, but you knew none of it was over when another lot lizard came in the bar — and she was *wrong*, too.

**Concept:** You don't know what's wrong with the world, but you see it every once in a while now that your eyes have been opened. You know you're not capable of the things that that other guy can do. Yet you're not the same anymore, either, because no one else seems to recognize the wrong people the way you and your "partner" do. So what are you supposed to do about it?

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're young, energetic and eager to prove yourself. That combination will make you great or kill you. It seemed like the former before, but now.... You try to balance all parts of your life — school, your father, your job — but you find yourself drawn to a calling that you don't understand.

**Equipment:** jeans, flannel shirt, textbooks, notepad, pen



# HUNTED

## THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: REBEL

PLAYER:

CONCEPT: ONE OF THE BOYS

DEMEANOR: SURVIVOR

### ATTRIBUTES

#### PHYSICAL

Strength	● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity (Nimble)	● ● ● ● ○
Stamina	● ● ● ○ ○

#### SOCIAL

Charisma	● ● ○ ○ ○
Manipulation	● ● ○ ○ ○
Appearance	● ● ○ ○ ○

#### MENTAL

Perception	● ● ● ○ ○
Intelligence	● ● ● ○ ○
Wits	● ● ○ ○ ○

### ABILITIES

#### TALENTS

Alertness	● ● ● ○ ○
Athletics	● ● ○ ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge	● ● ○ ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	● ● ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	● ● ○ ○ ○
Melee	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ● ○ ○ ○
Survival	● ● ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### KNOWLEDGES

Academics (Drama)	● ● ○ ○ ○
Bureaucracy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	● ○ ○ ○ ○

### ADVANTAGES

#### BACKGROUNDS

Allies	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Mentor	● ● ● ● ●
Resources	● ● ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### MERITS&FLAWS

NAME	RATING
	1 X
	2 X
	3 X
	4
	5

#### VIRTUES

COURAGE	REASON	SELF-CONTROL
1 X	1 X	1 X
2 X	2 X	2 X
3 X	3	3 X
4	4	4
5	5	5

### DERANGEMENTS

### CONVICTION



### WILLPOWER



### EXPERIENCE

--

### HEALTH

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

## NOTABLE BYSTANDERS

While isolation from any kind of hunter society and exceedingly rare access to hunter-net has meant that few bystanders have ever gained much recognition, some have nonetheless won themselves a reputation — good, bad or outright disastrous. These bystanders are exceptions rather than the rule — those who rise above the absolute fear, helplessness and denial that plagues people who hear the call and cover their ears.

### ALISON HERSY, AKA RABBITKEEPER377

Alison Hersy was not the first bystander on hunter-net. In fact, her lack of edges and second sight was really not a factor in her understanding of the truth of the world and the fact of monsters' existence. It didn't matter that she couldn't do things that other "informed" posters professed to. She had existed side by side with a creature for months. She'd had ongoing, firsthand contact with the supernatural. She'd endured a miserable existence that not even the most battle-hardened or forgiving chosen could imagine — and she had none of the others' so-called advantages.

Despite (or perhaps because of) her unique experiences and situation, Alison frequents hunter-net. It is her primary means of contact with anyone, other than her son, who can understand some part of what she has endured. She's not an active contributor, though, and few posters believe the degree of contact with the supernatural that she professes. Others dismiss her input given her confusion or misunderstanding of qualities that most hunters

claim to possess, such as second sight and knowledge of the Word.

And yet, Rabbitkeeper is still welcome on the list. Observant and open-minded readers understand that nothing can be taken for granted about the world when the chosen really know so little. Others hear Alison out in hopes that she might offer some insight or clue about her experiences that no other hunter has undergone or shared.

Indeed, the list might give her a voice and a means of expression that she has never had in life, not even before being changed. Her recent turmoil has caused her to realize that she has always been a victim of one sort or another, whether of restrictive parents, a controlling husband or abusive creatures. She has been molded to be extremely introverted, and only now does she seek to take control of her own fate in the worst of all possible worlds.

And yet, her self-discovery might come too little, too late. Her longtime seclusion and desperate need to appease her controllers grants her little influence over her son, who has established a self-destructive course of his own. Furthermore, it can only be a matter of time before evidence of her husband's remains or of his abrupt disappearance is discovered and traced to her — assuming that any sign of him remains after his supernatural existence.

#### PROFILE

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Drive 2, Empathy (Pain) 4, Etiquette 3, Finance 1, Intuition 3, Research 2, Subterfuge 3, Technology 1

**Backgrounds:** Bystanders 1, Continued Exposure 5, Resources 3

**Courage:** 1, **Reason:** 4, **Self-Control:** 3, **Conviction:** 5, **Willpower:** 3

### STEPHEN LAMBERT, AKA MODERATOR87

Stephen Lambert was the first hunter-net poster to break its primary rule: Don't reveal who you are. He posted his name, phone number and the fact that his wife was crippled because of his personal inaction when a creature assaulted her. Perhaps he suffered from intolerable guilt over the event and sought an end that he could not inflict upon himself. Or perhaps he sought to start a grassroots movement among this electronic community to help him undo the damage he had indirectly caused.

Since making himself available in the real world, Lambert has been the target of ongoing attack online. If it were true that he could not





detect creatures after that first time, many asked how he found hunter-net at all, fearing that he might actually be one of them laying a trap for the gullible. Others asked how he could acquire information about creatures when he professed to have no capabilities or "sight" like the imbued.

Lambert ignored the questions and attacks, responding only by giving information to those who would listen. Detailed information on suspected monsters' whereabouts, habits and behavior. He became perhaps one of the most active and accurate sources of information on the list. Lambert's intelligence gained him some respect and even a following. But other posters insisted on knowing how he acquired his information. By then, Lambert's evasiveness online stood in stark contrast to his initial candor. And yet, those who have dared to gather reports from him have described a rewarding relationship and positive results against the enemy. They propose that he is an exceedingly effective organizer with numerous allies and sources, be they other hunters, "duds" or perhaps even deserving creatures with whom he has allied. The most extreme theory suggests he is in fact one of the Messengers, and that his words are carefully disguised mandates from above.

The fact is that Lambert is a lonely, terrified blind man with a crippled and utterly dependent wife. His so-called "ring of associates" is a handful of fearful but alert hunters and other lost. All that he truly has at his disposal are well-placed contacts from his life before, excellent facility with his specially developed computer technology, a natural sense for human nature and a study of statistics and probabilities.

Lambert was born in New York City. His father was a prominent lawyer who was unprepared and emotionally incapable of raising a disabled son. Fortunately his mother was more forgiving, and she taught him an intuitive understanding of the world. Combining his mother's empathy and his father's alertness and savvy, Lambert became a keen analyst of human behavior, paying close attention to people's statements rather than their appearance.

Despite his disability, Lambert lived a fairly normal life. That all changed, however, when he and his wife were attacked by a walking corpse — or so Lambert identified it afterward. They were out late when Lambert heard the inexplicable words, "THE DEAD WALK." He was then struck by the overwhelming stench of rot, followed by his wife's screams. Lambert himself was left untouched and helpless, but his wife was left in a coma.

It was in the tortured weeks that followed that Lambert discovered hunter-net and began to guess what really might have happened that night.

He has since dedicated his life to identifying creatures with his existing talents, and he demonstrates a willingness to put himself on the line to get results, even though he was never truly "imbued." Perhaps his reliance on senses and observation beyond sight have made him receptive to and capable of digesting the existence of monsters.

He uses gathered sources of information from across the country such as newspapers, publicly available documents, email, websites and reports to search for odd occurrences, anomalies, contradictions and flawed cover stories. After turning seemingly random pieces of information into a coherent picture of possible monster activity, Lambert makes the information available to list members who might operate in the vicinity of a suspected creature.

Those who have the respectable or solemn honor of meeting Lambert encounter an obsessed blind man, who sequesters himself in the darkness of his small home with his voice-operated computer when he is not caring for his invalid wife. His goal is to identify the monster that crippled her, but not even he knows how he'll respond if and when that day comes. For the moment, hunters might hope that it never does. Despite the crushing odds against him, Lambert has become an invaluable contributor to the cause.

### MARTIN SOLDAN

Many bystanders never even learn that hunters exist. They might witness a monster or a horrific event, but they may not see or understand that people exist who do respond to the experience. Those bystanders



who are left alone and helpless can suffer self-loathing or feelings of betrayal for being exposed to a deadly world without any ability to do anything about it. Still others react with anger — infuriated that a truth exists that they glimmer only momentarily. Martin Soldan is one of the latter.

The son of a Catholic pastor, Martin grew up in a Hispanic district of Miami. While Martin's faith was as strong as his father's, it was more superstitious than religious, centered more on a fascination with demons and angels, heaven and hell, than on Christ and a way of life. By the age of 16, Martin had fallen into street life, much to his father's despair.

It was during a gang rivalry that Martin actually saw the demons that fascinated him. In one horrifying, life-altering moment, Martin realized that *things*

ranked among the opposing gang members, and they were instrumental in wiping out Soldan's group. He stood paralyzed by childhood fears while his friends were beaten to death and violated horribly. Perhaps he would have died, too, if he had not been saved by fellow gang member Alrilio Salas — who also recognized the creatures that attacked them. Salas' response was to rescue the one person he could before it was too late.

The boys went their separate ways as they tried to come to grips with what they'd seen. Martin sought solace and answers through prayer. Salas soon learned that monsters were everywhere, and he came to believe that his gang must have been betrayed from within by creatures as well. When the survivors searched for a traitor, Martin grew angry that God had apparently blessed Salas with the strength to see and respond to the demons, yet left him powerless. Why had Salas — a bad Catholic — been rewarded when Martin had not?

Before long, however, Martin believed that he had found the answer. Salas eventually encountered other people who could see, hear and respond to the creatures, but none of them understood what the things were or where they came from. Thanks to the theology that his father had taught him, Martin offered answers in God and the Devil. Less religious and informed of the Scripture, the others accepted Martin's explanation and began to rally to his beliefs and teachings.

A handful of Miami imbued now look to Martin for answers about monsters, the world and God. Although these people might have come from different backgrounds and belief systems, they are quick to put credence in Martin's Biblical explanations for reality, given the complete lack of answers that they alone can provide.

# HUNTED

## THE RECKONING

NAME:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE:

PLAYER:

CONCEPT

DEMEANOR:

### ATTRIBUTES

#### PHYSICAL

Strength	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Dexterity	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Stamina	● ○ ○ ○ ○

#### SOCIAL

Charisma	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Manipulation	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Appearance	● ○ ○ ○ ○

#### MENTAL

Perception	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Intelligence	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Wits	● ○ ○ ○ ○

### ABILITIES

#### TALENTS

Alertness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Athletics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### KNOWLEDGES

Academics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bureaucracy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### ADVANTAGES

#### BACKGROUNDS

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○

#### MERITS&FLAWS

NAME	RATING
	1
	2
	3
	4
	5

#### VIRTUES

COURAGE	REASON	SELF-CONTROL
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5

### DERANGEMENTS

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### CONVICTION

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
WILLPOWER	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
EXPERIENCE	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### HEALTH

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>



# CHAPTER 2: RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

*To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

— 1Corinthians 9:22

Storytelling games are about creating and telling horror stories with heroes, monsters and victims — sometimes all wrapped into one — at their core. The rules of any such game are secondary to these tales and the fun you have spinning them. You therefore should not be pigeonholed by any specific set of systems that decide how you create your character or tell your story. This chapter presents some new approaches to character creation and development, and therefore ways to play **Hunter**.

## CUSTOMIZING CHARACTER CREATION

Wayne paused a moment to signal Kate to sit quietly. He watched his target through the rifle sight and whispered, "He's moving. Is the door covered? If they know we're here, they'll be all over us." Kate responded with an affirmative-sounding monosyllable.

From his hotel room window, Wayne tracked the target as it walked along the street and spoke to a hooker. Poor girl, Wayne thought. As his finger tightened on the trigger, the door burst open and things charged in.

Wayne pulled the trigger and ducked away from the sniper rifle, cursing as he tried to free his pistol from his shoulder holster. Kate spun, produced a sharpened piece of wood and slammed it into the first

intruder's chest. He fell backward, mouthing a scream but making no noise.

The other two intruders literally blurred, moving too quickly for Wayne or Kate to see. Kate backed away, relying on her years of martial arts practice. Wayne finally pulled the pistol free, and he began to shoot wildly.

Kate didn't even know one of the bloodsuckers had gotten behind her until she felt an iron grip around her throat, claws digging through her skin. She thought she felt something wet spill across her chest, but she was suddenly too dizzy to understand what it was. She slipped into darkness wondering, of all things, how she would afford the dry-cleaning bill.

Wayne managed to shoot his assailant once before the creature ripped the pistol from his hand, and the trigger finger with it. Wayne barely had time to register the loss before the monster smashed the pistol butt against the former contractor's temple with enough force to embed it there.

Finished with Kate, the first monster laughed. "Give 'em guns and shit, they think they're invincible." He paused to pull the stake from his compatriot's chest. "And stop your bitching. You'll live."

This article explores different approaches to character generation for **Hunter**. The rulebook details a fairly stringent system by which characters



*[Handwritten signature]*

are designed, with specific points to spend on Traits, such as the 6/4/3 array for Attributes. The rules also impose specific limitations on how high Traits can be rated (3 for Abilities before freebie points are spent, for example). Those systems work fine, and are the Storyteller system standard for creating normal, mundane people (which is exactly what hunters are before and arguably after they're imbued). Each troupe is different, though, and all players have different tastes and different thoughts about what makes a fun character. For some people, the "mundane human" character-creation system isn't very satisfying. They want broader options to create the people they envision, or would like to play someone who is perhaps slightly above the human norm. This article details various approaches to character creation to allow more latitude in design.

Understand, however, that the intent here is to provide you with more creation options to explore your character's identity in further depth and to offer her more layers of personality. Access to more and different Abilities and Backgrounds says more about your character's origins and life up to now, which should all be explained as part of her prelude. The following systems allow you to inject diversity into your character — access to a higher Linguistics score might mean she has worked abroad, and not

just in one country. They're not intended to give you access to 5 Firearms, 5 Arsenal and 5 Strength. Although you could certainly use the following material to do that, you'd be missing an opportunity to play a character who's more interesting, rather than just an extreme version of the action hero.

All that said, this article proposes *optional* systems for **Hunter** character creation. Your Storyteller must approve use of these ideas, and probably should extend them to all players. If one character in your group has more points available at character creation than the rest, some rationale or explanation should be provided. Maybe he's older, more privileged or has pursued a skill-intensive career and has just done or learned more than most people. Don't just show up for your first **Hunter** game with a more capable character than the other players' unless the Storyteller (and maybe your fellow players) has okayed it.

### **HUNTER CONSTRUCTION KIT**

So you sit down to create a **Hunter** character, imagining how she'll compare to past ones for Storyteller games — Garou fighting for Gaia, Kindred plotting in the shadows, mages fighting wars over reality. Then you realize that the imbued get the kinds of scores that every wimpy mortal gets in the other games. What gives?

Playing a “weak” character isn’t a deficit to roleplaying and doesn’t have to ruin your fun. In fact, a “weak” character, like one of the imbued in the World of Darkness, can be a challenge. Suddenly, just staying alive and clinging to the mundane aspects of life such as family, job and possessions becomes important, as opposed to going out, kicking ass, taking names—and taking the supernatural for granted. **Hunter** focuses on normal people confronted with the knowledge that monsters are real. While it’s plausible that some imbued have at least a passing acquaintance with combat techniques, most characters aren’t very effective in a fight. How many actual, everyday people are? Still, some players are happier with more competent characters or with a few more dots to better fill out their concepts. Nothing’s wrong with that. If you really want to remain true to **Hunter**’s mood, create a character who is still a regular person—a construction worker, a systems analyst, a landscaper—who simply has a broad base of interests and capabilities. More points to play with doesn’t automatically have to translate into a special-forces-trained-killer-turned-spy-cum-professional-wrestler.

The following are various alternative methods of character creation, each based on a theme. The Storyteller might endorse use of a system if it coincides with the theme he intends to pursue in your chronicle.

## EQUAL TO THE TASK

Players and Storytellers may be more comfortable with characters who are roughly the equal of the monsters they face—at least in terms of Attributes and Abilities. This approach diminishes some of the risk inherent to dealing with monsters in a mundane capacity. Such characters have somewhat higher Physical, Social and Mental Attributes, plus access to more Talents, Skills and Knowledges, but the imbued still have the same access to Virtues, edges and awareness of the supernatural as ever. Yes, your character may be able to drive better or perform more rewarding research, but he still brings human potential to bear against the monstrous.

Apply the following changes to the creation process outlined in **Hunter**, pp. 84-85.

### Step Two: Choose Attributes

7/5/3 to be allocated to Social, Mental and Physical categories. One point is gained in each Attribute for free, as per the normal rules.

### Step Three: Choose Abilities

13/9/5 to be allocated to Talents, Skills and Knowledges. The Storyteller may rule that no Ability can be raised above three unless freebie points are spent on it.

### Step Four: Choose Advantages

Choose Backgrounds (7), Virtues (3) and edges (according to your Virtue allocations).

### Step Five: Last Touches

Record Conviction (according to creed) and Willpower (starts at 3)

Spend freebie points (21). Add the following to the Freebie Point Costs on p. 85:

Permanent Conviction—4 points per dot. Each permanent Conviction point purchased is added to your character’s “starting Conviction” score. The total is the base rating to which Conviction returns to when you cash in 10 Conviction points for a Virtue point. You should not be able to raise starting Conviction beyond your character’s starting Willpower rating (which means you may have to increase your character’s Willpower score, too). It’s *highly* recommended that starting Conviction be limited to 5.

It’s possible to go beyond the above point allocations and pools. Want to give imbued 15/10/5 Abilities, 8 Backgrounds and 35 freebie points? Go for it, but be careful of your game’s power balance. **Hunter** is about people who are in over their heads against monsters, which they do not (and probably never will) understand. If your character is more powerful than the monsters he faces, your character won’t be vulnerable and one of the game’s greatest appeals will be lost.

It’s easy to rationalize characters with higher than usual Attribute and Ability scores. Perhaps the Messengers anticipate that the group will deal with powerful opponents, its members must be up to the task and are chosen accordingly. Each of the characters could be imbued with other, less capable hunters, and watch friends and allies succumb to injuries and fates that the more potent individuals endure. These “higher” hunters might find each other through a literal process of elimination, or they might seek allies who can handle the same problems that they can. Or, the Storyteller could decree that all “elevated” characters must have at least three points in the Destiny Background and then allude to great (i.e., awful) things ahead when players have access to more than usual points at character creation.

## POOLING CREATION POINTS

This option provides increased flexibility in character creation. It allows you to create a character who isn’t particularly remarkable in terms of Abilities, but who has a lot of raw potential (read: Attributes). Alternatively, it can also allow for a character who has a lot of Abilities and low Attributes. This flexibility allows for a more realistic rather than balanced character. Whereas the Story-

teller system limits the points you can spend in any one Trait category and forces you to have a fairly broad spectrum of capabilities, this approach allows you to focus on particular interests (although at the expense of other capabilities — say, Mental Attributes and Knowledges over Physical Attributes and Skills).

Rather than prioritize Attributes and Abilities into primary, secondary and tertiary categories, lump all Attribute dots into one pool (13 dots under the standard character-creation rules) and/or all Ability dots into one pool (22 for the standard system). Now divide up each group as you like. Each Attribute already has one free dot, as per the normal rules. The Storyteller may still decree that no Ability can be raised higher than 3 at this stage.

**Example:** Bill creates a character for Lisa's *Hunter* game. Lisa informs Bill that Attributes and Ability points are pooled separately for character creation. Bill has 13 dots to allocate among his nine Attributes. He decides he wants a character with exceptional intellect and a likable personality, but who has limited physical capacity. Bill assigns two dots to Perception, four to Intelligence, one to Wits, three to Charisma, and one dot each to Manipulation and Appearance. Finally, he puts one in Stamina, to avoid his character's being completely physically incapable. Moving on to Abilities, Bill assigns two dots to Alertness, two to Empathy, one to Expression, two to Intuition, two to Etiquette, three to Technology (he wants the character to be something of a tech-head), three to both Academics and Computer, and two to both Investigation and Research.

His final numbers look like this:

**Physical:** Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intuition 2

**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Technology 3

**Knowledges:** Academics 3, Computer 3, Investigation 2, Research 2

For even more flexibility, convert all of your character's starting points (with the exception of those for Willpower, Conviction and Virtues) into freebie points. That is, each point normally allocated to Attributes (13 in all) is worth 5 freebie points. Each point normally allocated to Abilities (22) is worth 2 freebie points. And each Background point is worth 1 freebie point. That gives you a pool of 114 freebie points with which to purchase your character's Traits as you choose. Each Trait costs a number of freebie points, as usual — 5 per Attribute, 2 per Ability, 1 per Background and 1 per Willpower and Conviction. This system allows you to buy whatever Traits you like, pending any limitations

that the Storyteller imposes. As always, you get one free point in each Attribute.

**Example:** Heather creates a character and has 114 freebie points to spend. Heather decides she wants a teenaged runaway who is quite vigorous and talented, but who still has a lot to learn about the world. With this in mind, she spends 80 freebie points to purchase 16 Attribute dots. She assigns two dots to each of Strength and Stamina, and three to Dexterity. For Social, she assigns one dot to each of Charisma and Appearance, and puts two dots into Manipulation. With five dots remaining, she assigns two dots to each of Perception and Wits, and one dot to Intelligence.

Moving on to Abilities, she has 34 freebie points left. She decides to spend 26 on those, for 13 dots. She assigns these dots to: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Leadership 1, Linguistics 1, Science 1 and Streetwise 2.

With eight freebies remaining, Heather assigns them to the following Backgrounds: Allies 2 (friends on the streets), Contacts 2 (a counselor and a police officer), Patron 4 (she thinks the otherworldly nature of frequent contact from Messengers will create good roleplaying opportunities).

Heather could have dedicated freebie points to the purchase of more Willpower and/or Conviction, too, increasing her standard starting numbers in each (in this case, 3 for each).

## RAISING SPECIFIC TRAIT TOTALS

Raising the starting point totals for all Attributes or Abilities can have a dramatic affect on play — simple plumbers or teachers with conventional life experiences now have the potential to be considerably more. If you want to achieve some higher potential, but not sweepingly so — say, you want your character to have a lot of raw capacity and little actual exploration of it, or you want your character to be well-educated and competent but otherwise average — add points to Attribute or Ability pools, respectively. Or if you want an unusually well-connected character, add points to Backgrounds. This revision to character creation allows characters to show a spark of potential or destiny, without being something more than human. Perhaps it's that very spark that attracts the Heralds' attention.

Suggested numbers are five additional points for Attributes, 10 for Abilities and five for Backgrounds.

### ATTRIBUTES

Increasing the points available to spend on Attributes makes your character generally more competent. He may not be trained at certain sports, but a high Dexterity gives him a good chance at succeeding in leaping or riding attempts. When it comes to a group of hunters, too many dots here could

result in hyperathletic supergeniuses with the force of personality to lead nations.

A character with raw capabilities (higher than usual Attributes) might be chosen by the Messengers for the hunter he can become. He has potential now, but when he combines that with experience gained on the mission (and with Abilities), he will be a force to contend with for the supernatural.

#### Abilities

Too many points available to spend on Abilities leads to problems similar to Attributes, but on a different scale. A character with five dots in an Ability is among the best in the world. Being the best in a number of fields or areas begins to make a hunter a cartoon or pulp-fiction character. Ideally, points to be spent on Abilities should be increased so that characters may be good at one or two Talents or Skills, or perhaps of moderate capability in a number of them. Doling out too many points denies players the experience of playing everyday people.

A character with typical potential but unusual training may be chosen by the Heralds for the specific or diverse roles the person can play in the hunt. Such a hunter may not be very fast or strong, but his extensive familiarity with Leadership might make him a rallying figure for the imbued, for example. Or his respectable training in Medicine, Empathy, Science and Politics might allow him to address the many needs of a burgeoning hunter community.

#### Backgrounds

Backgrounds represent who your character knows, what he owns and the tools and facilities from his previous life that he can draw upon now. A character with increased Background points has more at his disposal — people, favors, money — even though he is nothing special in terms of raw potential or training. Be careful about going overboard with Backgrounds. Your character should never have the President of the United States in his back pocket. These Traits also indicate debts owed and favors extended to other people; Backgrounds often work both ways. The more points your character has, the more he is indebted to others, and the more challenging it can be to pursue the hunt. It's hard to kill vampires when you have to pay visits to allies, keep those allies happy and avoid exposing them to what you've become.

A character with higher than usual Background ratings might be imbued because he can outfit, support, maintain and back up his own efforts against the supernatural, and those of any fellow hunters. Some imbued may be intended to work from behind the scenes, knowing that monsters exist but not necessarily fighting them on the frontlines.

#### Experienced Hunters

A different take on a **Hunter** game involves experienced chosen. They've been imbued, have dealt with some or even several monsters in their own unique ways, and acquired some expertise at the hunt. The amount of experience that each hunter has in a group is probably comparable, assuming that the people who were imbued together are still together now, months or perhaps even a year later. Gaining experience on the hunt is rather ironic. Your character might have learned to hide from and survive the monsters of the world. He might have discovered some practical means of affecting them, whether helping or harming. And he has probably gained more Traits since he started. But the average hunter learns very little or almost nothing about the depths of monsters' existence — where they come from, why they exist, whether they can ever be wholly reconciled or eliminated. Although hunters have already acquired experience when play begins, they really know nothing more revelatory about the other side than they did at that first fateful encounter.

You might want to play tested hunters to acquire some of the edge and capabilities that really put monsters on the defensive. You might want to explore the closer relationship with the Messengers that experienced imbued seem to have. You might want to roleplay the issues that arise when reconciling personal goals with "mature" hunters' strained minds and wills. Or, you might simply be joining an established troupe and need a character who can keep up with and support the rest of the group.

When established characters are played, previous encounters with creatures should be detailed to some extent so players can work out how the characters approach such things. Do they kill? Do they try to make monsters humane? Not every monstrous encounter need be detailed, but a theme or trend should be established. Perhaps characters encountered a ghost at their imbuing and have had a particular sense or affinity for dealing with spirits ever since. Maybe a conflict among monsters has become apparent to the characters, who now need to decide which side they're on — if any at all. Players establish their characters' creeds now, and those choices impact on how past events occurred. Zealots would have behaved aggressively at various times of their careers, while the Merciful would have been conciliatory, coloring how monsters were dealt with, and what the group values or aspires to in the present. This history is really an extended prelude for the players' purposes. Like any prelude, it can foreshadow enemies and events to come.



To create an established character, start with a beginning one. That's the person your character was when he was imbued. You may choose creed based on your character's personality, or the Storyteller may assign you a creed based on your character's reaction to the truth at his imbuing.

The Storyteller should assign you and all other players the same number of experience points to spend on your character, to represent his formative days as a hunter. Anywhere from 30 to 40 points might be appropriate to make characters moderately powered. It's your job to explain why these points are spent as they are. Explain why your character trains to improve his Charisma, or takes pains to learn the nuances of Performance. These explanations and rationales help indicate who your character has become since his imbuing — what's he's given up of his past life, what's important to him now.

Backgrounds can't be purchased with experience points, although your starting character surely gains more influence and perhaps loses friends as he dedicates himself to the hunt. The Storyteller may bestow Background points upon you or take them away. Perhaps you gain three to five points in existing or new Traits, but also lose anywhere from one to three points in others. See the article "Backgrounds Make the Hunter" on changing Backgrounds after play begins for guidelines on how such Traits can change after the imbuing.

Virtue scores definitely rise once a character undertakes the mission. These points are the reward (and as derangements set in, the punishment) for embracing the hunt. Depending on how far advanced your character is in your chronicle, he may have gained three to six Virtue points. The exact type — Mercy, Vision or Zeal — is chosen by you based on events and encounters since your character was imbued. Your account of your character's recent past has significant bearing on how you should assign Virtue points. Being an aggressive monster-fighter doesn't usually lend itself to Vision or Mercy. The Storyteller should agree with your Virtue assignments, and remember that you must still adhere to the rules that creed imposes on Virtue rating — your character's rating in his creed's primary Virtue can never be exceeded by a rating in another Virtue.

Your advanced character's edges are a product of his Virtue scores. Unless the Storyteller says that he'll assign edges, you can choose the ones your character has manifested thus far. Decide what capabilities are appropriate for who your character has been, and consider those that would have helped your character survive and pursue his take on the hunt. Remember that the highest rated edge your character has in his

creed path cannot be exceeded by any other edge. So, your experienced Redeemer has edges from the Redemption path, say up to level three. Based on your character's Virtue scores, he can also have edges from other creed paths — perhaps Zeal's — to help your character keep monsters at a distance while he reasons with them. Edges from other creeds paths simply can't be rated four or higher.

Also bear in mind that established imbued suffer the rigors of their calling and begin to approach madness as the calling becomes too much to bear. For every Virtue point that your character has rated at level 7 or higher, she has one derangement. Decide why obsessions, delusions or ailments are appropriate to your character's mindset until that point, and integrate them into his personality and your roleplaying. If you're lucky enough to have Virtues under 7 when play with an experienced hunter gets under way, remember that the shadow of madness looms.

Assume your character's Conviction score at the start of your game is his standard starting rating for his creed — 3 for a Judge or 4 for an Avenger, for example.

Hunters' creed books all present established and prominent imbued of their respective Chapter 6. These people are excellent examples of the kinds of characters you can play in an advanced chronicle. Use them as models for your own hunter design.

## THE INCENTIVE PROGRAM

One character-creation option the Storyteller may choose to apply is a reward system for players who contribute to character identity and the game, above and beyond call of duty. Offering a few extra freebie points as incentive for players to further develop their characters and the chronicle can work wonders for roleplaying and the story. This system assumes the standard creation rules from the rulebook are used, only supplemented to reward ongoing creation efforts. The Storyteller can award you seven to 10 extra freebie points at character creation by agreeing to do one of the following throughout your game. You get the points when play begins, but they make you responsible for an intensive creative roleplaying effort thereafter. Note that performing more than one of these efforts reaps no more freebie awards, but it certainly helps you flesh out your character even further.

In all cases, real-world online chat lists, such as a simulated hunter.list, are an ideal medium for ongoing, extracurricular exploration of your character.

### CHARACTER DIARY

This concept is simple: You agree to maintain an in-character diary of your character's exploits,

victories and defeats. This really doesn't need to be more than 500 words per session, unless you want to do more. Fewer words per session might be appropriate if the story calls for it and the Storyteller agrees, such as if your character is in a coma or has suffered such a devastating personal loss that not even words can convey his suffering.

### CHRONICLE JOURNAL

A player who keeps a journal records what happens each session, *for all characters*. This could be done as in-character fiction or as a narrative of events. Whatever form it takes, it provides a complete history of the chronicle that new players can read and that longtime regulars can refer to for amusement or to research a past encounter.

### SHORT STORIES

In something like a fusion of the two preceding options, a player elects to write stories about his character's exploits between games, or perhaps fictionalizes his exploits *during* games. Either way, the player offers entertaining reading (and perhaps added depth) about his character. Such fiction shouldn't kill off major characters or alter the status quo without the Storyteller's consent, but it can otherwise illuminate how the character's everyday life conflicts with his Messenger-imposed agenda.

If you ever fail to uphold your end of the agreement and stop keeping a diary or journal, the Storyteller can revoke some or even all of the extra freebie points you acquired at character creation. Maybe Influence or Resources Backgrounds fade or are lost because the records your character kept — some of which are used to blackmail acquaintances and enemies — are lost. Maybe your character's Research score drops because he falls behind leading technology when he's not gathering and recording information. Perhaps your character's Knowledges in general diminish because he no longer has such extensive and up-to-date records and references at his disposal.

### STAY ON TARGET

Despite this article's various methods of altering character creation that allow for more fully developed and even more capable imbued, don't lose track of what **Hunter** is. This is a game about normal people confronted with absolutely abnormal things and situations. While it's certainly possible to create a Navy SEAL with this article's systems, ask yourself what makes that person a compelling character. Someone who doesn't blink at the prospect of combat, fear or the unknown might not fit the suggested profile of a **Hunter** chronicle. One of the game's strongest thematic elements (perhaps its

defining element) is the contrast between the *normal everyday world* and the *hidden world*. Characters who are firmly a part of the former offer greater roleplaying potential when interacting with the latter. Using this article's suggestions to elaborate on character creation is intended to help and inspire you to design hunters who have a broad foundation in the everyday world, as opposed to creating characters drawn from the surreal.

## GAINING EDGES: NEW ROADS

*Nicholson shifted restlessly in his plastic chair and gave the coin-operated television a fraction of his attention. He didn't want to stand out too much, even in a bus station. Latimer was late. "Serves you right for believing his bullshit. Like anyone can learn the Messengers' gimmicks at will," he thought.*

*The hand placed unannounced on Nicholson's shoulder shook him out of his reverie. He had a fist readied before he realized that it was Latimer.*

*"Hello, son. I hear you want to learn some new tricks," the old man said.*

In **Hunter**, edges are gained through the acquisition of Virtue points. Your character starts out with three Virtue points to be spent as you choose (or as the Storyteller does), granting your hunter mysterious capabilities along one or on a combination of creed paths. Depending on your troupe's style of play, you may choose the edges that your character manifests as his Virtue ratings rise. Or the Storyteller might decide which capabilities your hunter demonstrates. He might suddenly discover that he's capable of vomiting up a noxious gas that's toxic to monsters, or he might inexplicably be capable of amazing feats of strength. Either way, your character probably has no idea where edges come from, how they're bestowed upon him or why he is their recipient. Indeed, the manifestation of strange new powers is almost never reassuring to hunters, who further question who they are and what they've become as they continue to perform more and more frightening feats.

This approach to power acquisition is certainly discomforting for characters — and likely to be for players who truly sympathize with the mundane people they portray. "Powers handed down from above" is something of a departure from the power-gain systems of other Storyteller games, however. In most other World of Darkness-based games, you spend experience points to increase your characters' powers. Vampires, werewolves or mages often have cultural, tutorial or training systems from which to learn what capabilities are possible and available, and they simply set out to acquire them.

Hunters don't have those kinds of certainties. They are often alone, are certainly ignorant of their origins and higher purpose, and can at best be hopeful of any goals they set themselves. What does become clear in time is that when hunters achieve successes and gather experience contending with monsters, the hunt intensifies all the more and new capabilities become available. Should the hunt grow too intense and powers reach beyond the realm of even imbued comprehension, the human mind can be overwhelmed, and chosen can forget what they valued before the change. They can become the veritable vessels of the Messengers, and they can appear to go mad. Manifestation of the most extreme hunter powers — the level-five edges — seems to be testament to that progression and utter loss of self.

This approach to character development, power acquisition and understanding of the calling is completely intentional in the game. A person's exposure to monsters and immersion in the hunt inexorably drags him deeper and deeper into another world, into a new life that inevitably departs from his old one. Perhaps that's exactly the fate that the Heralds want to befall their agents, or maybe that's a fate that the Heralds set in motion but have no control of once monsters are revealed. Either way, imbued who cannot contain themselves, who can't hold onto who they are, who cannot stop going too far have a dark destiny — assuming they survive that long.

But does **Hunter** have to be played this way? Do the imbued have to be subjected to unknowable forces and edges? Do they have to wrestle with the world's demons and their own inner ones? Does success against monsters and the development of greater capabilities have to mean personal ruin? Not at all. That's just the way the game approaches the concepts of the hunt. That's the mood and theme that **Hunter** pursues, in an effort to help you play very personal, terrifying games. But by no means do you have to play that way.

If you want to play **Hunter** in a different style or with a different general cosmology, you can. This article presents various ways in which characters can acquire Virtues and edges as they carry out the hunt. Each makes a different statement about the tone of the game you could play, because Virtue- and edge-acquisition are among the foundations of a chronicle's progress. Try these systems out as you please. Just remember that they're all optional. The official **Hunter: The Reckoning** systems and themes will proceed as seen in the rulebooks and supplements. You can reconcile the systems and stories of those books into your game, or disregard them completely.

Because the mechanics presented here are optional, your Storyteller must approve divergent rules for edge development. She is likely to implement a new system for all players, rather than just for some. If so, make sure that the whole troupe is ready to take the game in a different direction before implementing any of these ideas.

## EXPERIENCE

With this option, the imbued are aware of and can learn new edges rather than gain them directly and inexplicably from the Messengers. With this option, the Powers That Be are not so unknowable or perhaps they simply don't exist, and hunters are free to choose their own routes on and powers for the hunt. Indeed, Traits such as Conviction and Virtue are raised through experience expenditure.

This approach to edge acquisition requires that your troupe or the Storyteller arrive at a reason why edges are known and can be chosen. Maybe the potential for various powers lies within characters. Your hunter can sense what he might be capable of, say through dreams or visions, and may choose a course that best suits his beliefs and goals. Or the imbued may be "antibodies" that humanity has developed to fight the world's supernatural "infection," and each hunter can naturally develop the powers that he needs to fight his particular battles.

Alternatively, perhaps the only powers available are ones that are taught. The first might have been bestowed by the Messengers with the intent that they be passed to other imbued. Thus, your character may hear or read about a power in use, or even witness it, and approach the possessor for tutoring.

The freedom to choose powers and buy them with experience points is traditional for the Storyteller games. But, as suggested above, some effort must be made to learn a new effect — your character doesn't just demonstrate it spontaneously. The effort may go on behind the scenes of ongoing stories or a character may take time off when the hunt allows for study and practice. It may even be possible that initial uses of a new edge are at a difficulty or die-roll disadvantage until your character uses the power sufficiently during play, after which he may use the effect at will and without hindrance.

## SYSTEMS

You can purchase Conviction, Virtues and edges with the following mechanics.

### Changes to Conviction

Each character's starting Conviction at the beginning of a chronicle is the appropriate level listed in *Hunter*'s creed descriptions, pp. 64-77. Under the official rules, that's the score to which

Conviction drops after you cash in 10 points to gain a new Virtue point. Because Virtues are raised with experience in this system, however, Conviction is allowed more flexibility.

The Trait operates as normal, with points being risked on edge rolls or spent to activate second sight or edges. You can increase your character's starting Conviction score with experience points once play begins, however, at the rates listed on the Experience Cost chart below. At the beginning of each new story, your character's current Conviction pool drops back down to his modified start rating. Your character's Conviction pool can rise to a limit of 10 during a story as normal, thanks to successful edge rolls and appropriate roleplaying. But when the story ends, your character's current Conviction score returns to his modified starting rate. *Ten accumulated Conviction points are not traded in for more Virtue points.*

Although starting Conviction can be raised with experience points, it can never be raised higher than your character's Willpower rating. If her permanent Willpower rating is ever reduced, your starting Conviction score is reduced to match.

As with the normal rules, if you spend freebie points during character creation to acquire extra Conviction points, they are considered temporary Conviction. They do not raise your character's starting Conviction rating permanently. Spending experience points allows you to raise permanent Conviction once play begins.

### Changes to Virtues

Because experience points are used to raise Virtues, Conviction is not traded in for more Virtue points. Spend experience points to increase Virtues as indicated on the Experience Cost chart, below. Your character's Virtue rating determines the highest rated edge he can possess. Per the normal *Hunter* rules, his highest rated edge should still be in his creed path. Because you're purchasing edges with experience points, however, Virtue rating doesn't limit the total number of edges that your character can have. If a Defender has 3 Zeal, he can have the level-two Defender edge, as normal. But if you have enough experience points, your character can acquire every other Avenger and Judge edge up to level two as well, as long as his level-two Defender edge is never exceeded.

Furthermore, by spending experience to increase Virtues, your character is not inherently prohibited from acquiring level-five edges as she is in the rulebook. If you have enough experience points, your hunter can get level-five edges. There are still prerequisites for achieving level-five edges, though (see "Level-Five Edges," p. 91).

Whether characters with Virtues rated 7 or higher still develop derangements is up to the Storyteller. If hunters largely operate under their own will and power in your chronicle, Messenger influence might not harry them.

### Changes to Edges

The number of edges your character can possess is based on how much experience you can spend, but edge levels are still limited by your character's Virtue scores. Any edge in *Hunter: The Reckoning* or in the *Hunter Book* series is available for purchase.

Unless you want to change the nature of the game considerably, the first edges your character receives are ones the Messengers bestow at the imbuing. Afterward, development is left to you and your hunter.

Trait	Experience Cost
Permanent Conviction	New Rating x 5
Primary Virtue	New Rating x 3
Other Virtue	New Rating x 5
New Creed Edge	Edge Level x 5
New Non-Creed Edge	Edge Level x 7

**Example:** Zach has played Lucas Finn for several months and has managed to save 25 experience points. He decides he wants to improve Lucas' Virtues and purchase an edge or two, aspects of his character that Zach has neglected to date. As Lucas is a Judge, his primary Virtue is Zeal. At creation, Zach put all three Virtue points into Zeal and selected the Discern and Burden edges. Zach decides to raise Zeal to four dots now. Because the cost is New Rating x 3, he pays 12 experience points.

Zach then decides that Lucas needs more "fire-power" and decides to purchase Cleave. Lucas must learn it from another character. Because another character in the troupe is an Avenger and has Cleave, Zach and the other player work out an agreement. As Cleave is a level-one edge, it costs seven more experience points as a non-creed power, for a total expenditure of 19. Zach also decides that Lucas needs to acquire a higher Vision rating to have broader perspective for his judgments. The price for a non-primary Virtue is New Rating x 5, so Zach spends five experience and raises Lucas' Vision from zero to 1.

Zach has spent 24 experience points to boost Zeal to four dots, Vision to one dot, and has added Cleave to his list of edges.

### SACRIFICE

This approach to powers bases your character's Virtue increases and ultimately edge acquisitions on sacrifices of more mundane capabilities and connections. Your character literally gives up a little of who he was before the imbuing, and has perhaps been holding onto since, to gain more power and potency in the

hunt. This system works in conjunction with the standard *Hunter* rules, or can work in place of them (although the latter option would be extremely taxing on characters and players).

You can choose to relinquish your character's Attribute, Ability or Background Traits during play in exchange for points to apply toward Virtues. No character should be allowed to sacrifice more than one dot of any Trait in a single story to deter "cashing in" for truly high Virtues in one fell swoop. Depending of the Storyteller's leniency, lost ratings can be returned after a story or two or can be lost permanently.

Each Trait dot lost contributes a number of "advancement points," as follows:

Trait	Advancement Points per Dot
Attribute	Former Level x 3
Ability	Former Level x 2
Background	Former Level x 1

Advancement points are an extra means by which you can increase your character's Virtue ratings. This system is used in conjunction with cashing in Conviction for higher Virtues. Thus, you can trade 10 Conviction for a Virtue point, and you can also spend advancement points to gain even higher Virtue ratings.

Increasing a Virtue costs a number of advancement points equal to twice the new level for a primary Virtue, and equal to three times the new level for another Virtue.

Advancement points that are left over from a purchase can be saved for future Virtue increases or can be saved to acquire level-five edges, as discussed below.

**Example:** Brian's Visionary character has 10 Conviction. Brian decides he wants to raise his character's Vision from four to six dots, so he can purchase the level-three edge Delve. He can spend all 10 Conviction to raise Vision to 5, but he needs 6 Vision to have Delve. He decides to sacrifice Traits to get the Virtue score he needs. Making a sacrifice to attain 6 Vision costs 12 advancement points ( $6 \times 2$ , as Vision is the hunter's primary Virtue). Brian decides that Vision is more important than the capacity to relate well with others, and sacrifices his character's 4 Charisma, reducing it to 3. This loss provides the 12 advancement points Brian needs (4 Attribute rating x 3).

If Brian's sacrifice didn't amount to the needed 12 advancement points, he could not sacrifice another Trait dot in the current story. He could, however, save those 12 advancement points and make another Trait sacrifice in a subsequent story to acquire 6 Vision.

### EDGES

Edges are gained through the standard rules as per *Hunter*, p. 145. If you have extra advancement points left over after a sacrifice, however, and they are not

used to supplement a subsequent sacrifice, those leftovers can be used to gain level-five edges. See "Level-Five Edges," below.

#### STORYTELLING SACRIFICE

When a character sacrifices a dot from a Trait, it's not simply a matter of burning money (Resources) or mutilating herself (Appearance). It's such an intensely personal commitment to the calling that a hunter's mundane life suffers in some way to fulfill goals for the mission. Perhaps she consistently misses work and eventually loses her job, or she dismisses cultural ideals of beauty and decorum as inconsequential compared to the hunt. All sacrifices should be expressed in how your character's behavior and interactions with mundane society change. In effect, they take the narrative aspects of losing contact with normal life and make them a concrete part of the game, with commensurate penalties and rewards.

This system should be used to emphasize the barrier that arises between your character and the rest of the world — she's still human, she's still a part of society, but she's burdened with knowledge that she should not have and becomes an outsider. As she gains more Virtues (and by extension more edges), she further separates herself from the people and life for which she fights, slowly shedding her human identity and becoming an instrument of the hunt.

It's possible for some imbued to actively seek power with these optional rules, deliberately sacrificing elements of their former selves to become better hunters. Such a driven character may very well forego his belongings, quit his job or spurn his friends. Most imbued are unlikely to take such drastic measures deliberately until Virtues rise quite high and mental ailments set in, but it's possible for a character to start sooner than that.

Using this system, characters shouldn't gain derangements as quickly as normal for high Virtue scores. The cost of making sacrifices is already burden enough for imbued, and they start to gain derangements at 9 Virtue rather than 7.

#### MODIFIED EDGE COSTS

In the standard **Hunter** rules, edges cost a specified number of Virtue points — a level-one edge costs one Virtue point, a level-two edge costs another two Virtue points, for a total of three. The upshot of this system is that you max out at 10 Virtue points and level-four edges. There's nothing stopping you, however, from modifying this system to make level-five powers available in the normal 10-point Virtue range. If that's the kind of power levels that you and fellow troupe members want, go for it.



This optional system is a very simple amendment of the existing rules, allowing edges to be acquired with lower than usual Virtue scores, as follows:

Edge Level	Virtue Cost
One	One
Two	One
Three	Two
Four	Two
Five	Four

Thus, with this system a 10 Virtue can get you a level-five edge ( $1 + 1 + 2 + 2 + 4 = 10$ ). The normal cost of each edge after the first has simply been reduced. Certain requisites must still be met to attain the height of a level-five edge, though. See "Level-Five Edges," below.

Also remember that your character's primary Virtue still can't be exceeded by her rating in any other Virtue, and the highest rated edge in her creed path cannot be exceeded by any other edge she possesses.

## TASKS

Under this alternate Virtue system, the Messengers seem to watch the imbued and grant Virtue awards — and thus edges — to those who are most committed to the hunt. In this case, Conviction isn't enough for the Messengers. They're more concerned with what characters do rather than with what characters intend to do. Perhaps the Messengers seek to guide the hunt over the long term, or they believe that humans in general are not up to the task of performing the duties the Heralds delegate and so take an active hand.

This system bases Virtue advancement on actions. It's not a matter of experience points, but a matter of how well your character engages in the hunt. Conviction is still used with these rules, but not to raise Virtues. It's used for the standard purposes of activating second sight and edges, and it can still be risked on edge rolls to achieve larger dice pools. But characters get no particular benefit for raising Conviction to 10, beyond the obvious benefit of having those points to spend.

Your hunter has permanent and temporary scores in each Virtue. Each ranges from 1 to 10. Various actions award your character temporary points in Mercy, Vision or Zeal. At the end of a story, you can exchange 10 temporary points for a single permanent one of the same Virtue. Each Virtue's temporary and permanent totals are tracked separately. So, if a Judge has 10 temporary Zeal and 3 permanent Zeal at the end of a story, those 10 temporary points can be cashed in for a fourth permanent point. Meanwhile, the hunter can have a 2 temporary and 1 permanent Mercy score, and an 8 temporary and 2 permanent Vision score.

When temporary points are cashed in for permanent ones, your character's temporary score drops to zero to be rebuilt again.

Edges are gained as per the normal Hunter rules.

## GAINING TEMPORARY POINTS

Characters gain temporary Virtue points by taking actions related to the three Virtues. An act of compassion awards Mercy, one of forethought provides Vision and an act of decisive violence can award Zeal. Obviously, as hunters have philosophies toward monsters and the hunt (that is, they have creeds), primary Virtues are more likely to increase than are the other Virtues. A Redeemer is simply likelier to perform more compassionate deeds than to attack a being.

In general, the guidelines for action-based Conviction awards (*Hunter*, p. 138-139) can be used to decide whether a character deserves an appropriate temporary Virtue award. Likewise, Chapter 5 in each installment of the *Hunter Book* series details actions appropriate to the creeds that can win (or lose) Conviction. These guidelines may be used to earn temporary Virtue, instead. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides what actions warrant bonuses.

The Storyteller may even award temporary points in Virtues other than your character's primary if she believes your hunter has worked "outside the box" of his creed and gotten a wider perspective on or appreciation of monsters, the hunt or the world. Say, a Redeemer realizes not only that a creature can't be saved, but must be destroyed before it harms anyone else, and the hunter does so. Temporary Zeal might be forthcoming, rather than the more expected Mercy.

You may also take an active hand in raising your character's non-primary Virtue scores. Temporary points in your primary Virtue pool can be exchanged for temporary points of another Virtue on a two-for-one basis. Two temporary Mercy could be traded for one Zeal, for example. This exchange shouldn't happen "just because." There should be an in-character reason for the exchange. Perhaps an Innocent realizes that not all hunters have the best intentions for the world, and starts to doubt the motives of the Messengers. This insight might warrant two or more temporary Mercy being traded for temporary Vision.

## THE CREEDS

The following are some guidelines along which temporary Virtue points might be awarded, beyond the references listed above.

### MERCY

All hunters are capable of compassion, but Innocents, Martyrs and Redeemers focus on specific aspects of Mercy and should benefit from appropri-

ate actions and efforts. A Martyr who helps another at the expense of herself may gain one or two temporary Mercy. An Innocent could gain a temporary point by gaining a better understanding of a monster, or by showing it the consequences of its actions. A Redeemer who leads a monster to understand not only the harm it causes, but who convinces it to try to undo that harm could gain temporary Mercy. Simply convincing a monster to cease taking harmful actions for a brief time may be worth a reward — no matter what Mercy creed to which a hunter belongs.

#### VISION

Gaining Vision is a complex and often profound event for any of the creeds. Visionaries thrive on it, however. Imbued who seek better understanding, to learn why monsters are as they are, embody Vision. A character who pursues an important piece of information that improves her understanding of her

#### WHAT'S AN APPROPRIATE AWARD?

It's hard to say what an ideal temporary Virtue award is for any single action or for a game session or story. As with Conviction awards, it depends on how fast you and your Storyteller want your character to advance. Assuming characters are true to themselves and act according to the dictates of their creeds, they might gain a permanent Virtue point every two or three chapters or stories. Characters who behave in defiance of self, creed or Virtue might progress more slowly, to reflect their lack of focus.

Characters shouldn't receive temporary awards for the same actions over and over, either. Feeding the homeless may gain a Redeemer a point the first time, but repeat visits to the shelter shouldn't be repeatedly "profitable." Hunters need to look for new and different challenges to pursue their goals, act on their beliefs and fulfill their destiny.

Trading in temporary Virtues, whether for permanent or for temporary points of another kind, can occur at any time during a story. The most likely moments are when a character is invigorated, receives a revelation or is inspired to his cause in some way — say, an Avenger faces a child-killing creature, one like the monster that claimed her own child. Or, insight into a non-primary Virtue might be a timely moment for an exchange. Imagine that the bereaved mother is otherwise a Visionary who sees the merits of rage when faced with such a killer.

Alternatively, trade-ins can occur between stories, when characters would have time to reflect on their recent experiences and achievements.

condition or that of monsters is eligible to gain temporary Vision. This award might become appropriate during the roleplaying of a realization or during the explanation of a character's thought processes. A hunter can also gain temporary Vision through unique application of her understanding of monsters or the world.

#### ZEAL

Zeal is relatively simple to gain: Hunt and destroy monsters. Do not do so mindlessly, but do so. A Defender can gain Zeal through loyalty to friends, family and fellow imbued, through protecting those whom monsters might harm, and through finding ways to bring the hunt to monsters without inflicting undue harm on himself or those he protects. A Judge gains temporary Zeal through intelligent and balanced application of force. If she spares a lesser monster to gain access to a more powerful one, she may deserve a reward. Avengers can gain Zeal by taking revenge on monsters — inflicting eye-for-an-eye justice, although not necessarily in a reckless fashion. But as always, all imbued are capable of these actions, and hunters of other creeds might still be worthy of temporary Zeal for knowing when actions speak louder than words.

#### FREEFORM EDGES

In the official Hunter rules, characters' access to edges is fairly limited. Sure, if you have enough Virtue points, whether primary or not, your character can acquire various powers from various creeds, but once your character has an edge, he's pretty much stuck with it.

Under this alternative system, characters don't have "hard-coded" edges. Instead, they can try to draw upon the power of the Messengers (or whom-ever or whatever they believe creates hunters) when they think it's necessary. This approach makes characters less reliant on specific, seemingly reliable powers, but flexible access to powers can fail them in critical situations. By these rules, edges become something like "tools of last resort" rather than any standard means of dealing with monsters. This system could imply that edge use requires Messenger attention (even a little bit — the Messengers might be able to keep track of a lot of people at one time). But if the Messengers are distracted or otherwise not paying attention, an edge might not be available. If you want a game in which the characters and players are truly in the dark about the nature of their status as chosen and their intended purpose in the world, this is the edge system for you.

These mechanics dispense with any form of creed advancement to acquire edges, although access to powers is still limited by Virtue score.

Any means of increasing Virtues presented in the core rules or in this article is appropriate for use with this option.

During the chronicle, your character does not possess or even acquire any edges, not even as her Virtue scores increase. Instead, she can try to call upon edges "from above" through the expenditure of Conviction and a Virtue roll. Your hunter cannot call upon an edge that she could not purchase under the normal rules, and she can only call upon a total number of edges in a story that do not exceed her appropriate Virtue. For example, a Martyr with 6 Mercy could not attempt to use any Mercy edge higher than level three, and she could not call on more powers than would normally exceed her 6 rating. Thus, in one story, she could summon a single level-three edge (which costs three Mercy), a level two edge (two Mercy) and a level-one edge (one Mercy). Or, she could call upon six level-one powers (a total of 6 Mercy) on separate occasions.

Note that characters don't really know about specific edges as such. There's no master list available to hunters that says who can do what and when. Once an imbued has manifested a capability, however, he can knowingly call upon it again. Otherwise, hunters in trouble simply wish for assistance of some form. The manner in which each imbued does so is very personal, from prayer to rubbing a rabbit's foot to yelling a blood-curdling profanity. (Think of these invocations as similar to edges' triggers.)

Powers bestowed do not even have to belong to a character's creed, as long as they apply to the Virtue most suited to his intent at that moment, and the hunter could conceivably have those capabilities given his Virtue rating.

Thus, an Avenger who wants to strike down a monster might launch into a vicious tirade and receive Cleave. Then again, he might get Burden or Ward, instead. To best maintain the "mystery" of the powers available to the imbued, the Storyteller should select the edges characters receive. The player and character may suggest the type of edge needed, based on personal experience, but the final decision ought to rest with the Storyteller.

#### SYSTEM

You must spend one point of Conviction and roll the appropriate Virtue (difficulty 6) for your character to receive an edge. Normally only one edge can be bestowed to a character per scene, and it is available thereafter for the whole scene. Your character cannot access any edges of a level higher than the number of successes you score. If he wants a power that's level three, but you get only two successes, your hunter will still get a power to use but

it might not be as ideal as the one he hoped for, or it might be less than the answer to his situation. The Storyteller has the option of making edge-request rolls on players' behalf if she wants to create some real mystery around the powers.

If a roll is a complete failure — no successes are rolled — no edge is received, not even a partially useful one, and no more can be summoned by that for the remainder of that scene. Your Conviction point is not lost on a failure. If a Virtue roll botches, your point is lost, no edge is gained and your character can't summon another for the remainder of the chapter (game session). It's as if the Heralds have turned their backs on your character for some inscrutable reason.

Obviously, this system can deplete a hunter's Conviction score quickly. Using the pool to activate second sight and invoke powers is exhausting. The Storyteller has the option of allowing Conviction to be risked not only on rolls made with edges, but on edge-summoning rolls. Thus, Conviction can be risked on your Virtue roll to get a power. The effects of success, failure and botch all apply and increase or decrease your character's Conviction pool as if you were investing in an edge roll (see *Hunter*, p. 136 for the details of risking Conviction on rolls). You cannot risk Conviction on an edge-summoning roll and an actual edge roll in the same scene.

Acquisition of an edge in one scene does not make it immediately available in another scene. Another Virtue roll must be made and your character hopes to get the same capability again, but might not. A second attempt for the same effect also counts toward the total number of edges that your character may wield in a story.

Your Storyteller may choose to limit the number of edges your character can use to a game session or even scene rather than to a whole story, for a more action-oriented, powers-blazing game.

*Example:* Thomas is among a group of hunters who truly have no idea who or what has changed their lives. Thomas doesn't even have any particular powers at his disposal, just what some unknown force seems to grant him in times of need — when Thomas prays for dear life. Thomas is a Defender with 4 Zeal, 2 Mercy and zero Vision. When Thomas seeks to keep a monster from a potential victim and prays quietly for help, the Storyteller tells his player to spend a Conviction point and make a Zeal roll. The player gets three successes against a 6 difficulty. The Storyteller considers that Ward would be useful to Thomas in this situation, but as Thomas has 4 Zeal any level-two Zeal edge could be useful, and more than enough successes were rolled to get a level-two effect. The Storyteller

decides to award Thomas with Burden, with which to hold the monster in place while the hunter urges the potential victim out of the area. Thomas has access to Burden for the remainder of the scene.

## LEVEL-FIVE EDGES

In the official rules, **Hunter** makes level-five edges off-limits for players' characters. Certainly, some hunters have demonstrated powers of this magnitude, but those people appear to be completely insane, obsessed by unimaginable fears, ideas or visions, or are simply unintelligible to "lesser" hunters. In fact, some of these hunters make even imbued with multiple derangements appear normal. Given the rift that exists between such extremists and the rest of the imbued, it seems almost as if the chosen were never intended to achieve such heights of power. If many hunters can remain sane and deal with the monsters of the world, then perhaps the Messengers meant hunters to remain capable members of society — and perhaps some other power has lured certain imbued astray with promises of strength and potency....

Whatever the source of level-five edges, only the most enigmatic and frightening of hunters possess them. In fact, very few hunters even know of the existence of such powers or the people who wield them. Extremists of this caliber are extremely rare, or seem to be for now.

Imbued awareness aside, level-five powers are part of a **Hunter** game. As far as the rulebook is concerned, they're a distant part, but they don't have to be for your game. If your troupe wants to wield these awesome capabilities, the following optional rules make it possible. Understand, though, that access to these edges is costly to the imbued and their humanity. These are forces beyond mortal understanding and limits, even if your character seeks to use them with the best of intentions.

### SYSTEMS

Previous Virtue- and edge-acquisition systems in this article propose variable means of gaining level-five powers. Feel free to use those systems to gain access to the effects.

If you want to acquire the edges through the official **Hunter** rules, or through a more challenging version of this article's other systems, you can use the following approach. (Once again, these rules are not part of the standard **Hunter** mechanics. Access to these powers is not game canon.)

A hunter who attains 10 points in a Virtue is eligible to gain a level-five edge. The character has certainly paid his dues — he's already developed three derangements. That's only the start.

If you follow the pattern of Virtue costs for the edge levels, you see that each level-five edge should demand five Virtue points unto itself, for a total of 15 Virtue points for your character. (If a level-one edge costs 1 Virtue point, advancing to a level-two edge demands a total of 3 Virtue, and advancing to level-three and -four powers demands 6 and 10 Virtue points, respectively, then level five demands five more points for a total of 15.)

But Virtues can't be raised beyond 10. So how are level-five edges gained? They transcend the normal Virtue system. You must devote Willpower to gain the edge. It isn't a simple matter of just marking off five points of Willpower, either. A character who attains such an edge has to commit his life to the hunt, as well as make other sacrifices.

- **Willpower** — Reduce your character's Willpower rating (his permanent score) by five points to reflect the inhuman effort that must be made to contain the power of the edge.

- **Nature and Demeanor** — Your character's Nature and Demeanor both change to one of Autocrat, Fanatic or Perfectionist, reflecting her commitment and fanaticism.

- **Other Virtues** — Your character's other Virtues are frozen at whatever level they are when he gains a level-five edge. You cannot raise your character's other Virtues any further under any circumstances.

- **Disturbing Presence** — People find your character's very presence disturbing. Something about the way he carries herself, the distant look in his eyes or his soulless tone of voice drives them away. All Social dice pools are halved, rounded down, when dealing with normal people and most hunters. Imbued with Virtues rated 7 or higher, Hermits and Waywards don't suffer this problem in your character's presence. (Note that to supernatural creatures, even imbued with level-five edges still appear to be normal mortals. Perhaps monsters with supernaturally augmented senses can detect something different about your character, even compared to other hunters.)

- **Patron** — Your character automatically receives the Patron Background, rated 5, to reflect the near-constant input from the source of his power. Unfortunately, much like having a bullhorn blaring in one's ear, the messages are often distorted and difficult to understand. Acting on the visions and insights granted through this augmented Background can lead the imbued to very extreme, virtually inexplicable acts and atrocities. What specific behavior and crimes are committed are left up to you, with Storyteller input, based on your character's existing derangements. Murder and

torture are not impossible, even against unwitting and numerous victims.

- **Merciful Imbued** — A Merciful imbued at this level of power sometimes suffers clouded perceptions. A monster that doesn't deserve clemency may appear to be so anyway to your character's distorted senses. He might not even be able to explain why to other hunters, assuming that might be an issue; the reasons are "self-evident." In your character's fanatical devotion to her creed and Virtue, she can err on the side of forgiveness too often, giving otherwise irredeemable or dangerous creatures one too many chances. Once per story, the Storyteller can quietly inform you that your character sees potential in a truly monstrous creature and that it should be spared no matter the cost — maybe even in fellow hunters' lives.

- **Visionary Imbued** — Visionaries who push beyond any human limit can believe they know the truth in all circumstances and are likely to dismiss others' perspectives out of hand. Once per story, the Storyteller can quietly inform you that your character knows something with absolute certainty, no matter how implausible, and no argument can sway him. He acts on his belief, no matter how flawed, no matter how much evidence is presented to the contrary. He pushes on to the detriment of all else for the sake of his own insight.

- **Zealous Imbued** — Zealots of this intensity are prone to wild acts of violence without any sign of provocation — at least to human perceptions. Such imbued are prone to punishing others for superficial or even nonexistent crimes. The target can be a monster, a normal person or even another hunter. Once per story, the Storyteller can inform you that your character has decided that someone is a threat and needs to be destroyed at all costs. A Defender may see a target as a threat to whatever he protects. An Avenger may see him as a dangerous enemy. A Judge may decide a target has committed a heinous act worthy of death... or something worse.

*None of the preceding drawbacks can be counteracted through the spending or rolling of Willpower. Nor can your character be swayed from his beliefs or perceptions through the use of any supernatural power. Your character essentially receives the mind- and body-control protection conferred by spending a Conviction point, without you ever spending that point. Your character does not receive the benefits of having second sight active at all times; second sight must still be activated through the expenditure of a Conviction point. His mind and body are simply so dedicated to his creed and calling that supernatural powers cannot sway him, as a matter of course.*



**ONGOING SACRIFICES**

If you use the "Sacrifice" system for Virtue increases (presented earlier in this article), any leftover advancement points that aren't spent elsewhere can be dedicated to acquiring level-five edges. Ten advancement points offset any one of the drawbacks to gaining a level-five edge. Thus, spending 10 advancement points can eliminate the need to lose 5 Willpower points, or to have other Virtues frozen, or to change Nature and Demeanor, for example. Of course, coming up with advancement points inherently means some other kind of detriment to your character's former existence or self. The question is, which is more important, his current obsession with the hunt or the ordinary person he once was?

**FINAL NOTE**

A level-five edge is never something that's foisted on an imbued. It is something he must seek and accept. To gain such an edge, a character must prove his commitment to the hunt (specifically, to his own creed's precepts) to the exclusion of all else. Any kind of a normal life, in any of its forms or trappings, is considered an impediment.

The kind of imbued who wants to go to these lengths isn't a casual hunter. He's committed to the hunt to a degree that even other dogged imbued find baffling (and self-destructive). A character who still wants to complete his education and earn a doctorate isn't a candidate for this kind of power. Neither is a character who simply wants to keep his neighborhood safe from the waking dead. An imbued pushing this far probably does so because he believes the power he can attain will help him achieve goals he otherwise can't. The more an imbued can do, the more he must do, and so he forces himself to ever more accomplishments against the supernatural. It turns into a vicious cycle, ending with a person who's little more than a caricature of his former self. At best, he's a living personification of his creed, embodying its stereotypes for good or ill. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Gaining a level-five edge isn't a matter of selecting from a menu. It's the end of a long road spent focusing on the hunt at the expense of any kind of life. Most extremists who strive for this goal still fail to make it. Their madness makes them stray from the path, or they fall to the enemy or to other hunters who police their own. If your character can persevere through even these dangers, the epiphany of his transcendence probably involves performing one last act against monsters

or a perceived enemy. It might mean wiping out a massive nest of bloodsuckers. Spreading the word of hunters' origins. Or looking upon the Messengers face to face. No matter the goal, your character simply knows that achieving it will make him into something more than he's ever been before. If he gets that far, he probably doesn't let anything stand in the way of his ultimate achievement.

**A REMINDER**

As if it hasn't been said enough, this article's methods of increasing Virtues and gaining edges are optional. They're completely outside the box. None of them really suits **Hunter** cosmology as far as most characters and most of the game goes, but don't let that stop you if you're not satisfied with the default rules. Whatever you choose to do, please keep in mind that **Hunter** is about humans who know that monsters exist, and they have limited resources with which to do something about it. They don't know why they've been given this power, or how. So far, they have only a limited sense of who's behind it, and for all they know their speculations could be wrong.

Edges are meant to be just that: a little something extra to help the imbued survive in their struggle. Edges aren't meant to offer up world-beating power or to be a trump card that can protect hunters from all harm. They're meant to be used judiciously and carefully, not whenever they seem convenient.

Your troupe should use whatever rules it's comfortable with, but ought to be careful not to dilute the game's themes. If monsters aren't dangerous or terrifying any more, **Hunter** loses its spirit.

**A QUESTION OF FAITH**

*Someone with a flair for aphorism supposedly once said that death waits for no man. It's half true. A fire door slows death down enough to let you ponder just how unpleasant your immediate future is going to be when you're on one side of the door and dead things are on the other, losing their shit to get in.*

*Howard. Motherfucking Howard. I always knew you were a screw-up, but did you have to prove it by spilling your guts all over the floor of a gas-station shitter?*

*Panicking, twisting desperately to find some way out, I tried to step over Howie's gut-bath and willed myself not to puke. Lot of good that did. My burrito landed in Howie's spreading pool of blood, shit and intestines, which only forced up more bile. The fat old priest who was holding what was left of Howie flinched, but strangely seemed to have it under control. How the fuck did he get here, anyway?*

*How the fuck did I get here?*

Clarity came in insane, time-stop flashes of the past few hours. Howie and I were driving back to Michigan as fast as we could. We'd left Detroit to go to Milwaukee. We'd heard there was a bloodsucker near a college campus there. Dead coeds equal serial killer, right? At least the local cops thought so. But then, they couldn't catch fucking Jeffrey Dahmer right away, and he had a freezer full of people!

I could almost see it all again, in the hysteria of desperate seconds: The car running out of gas outside Gary. The fat guy with the priest's collar, sweaty face and armpit stains, stopping to give us a ride to the next gas station. The sign over the door telling us we were at "Hook's."

It was just a little after dark when we drove up. Two women and a big blond guy were there, the look of frightened suburbia on their faces. They stood in the garage while some old guy with a hook-hand pounded on the bent rim of their front wheel. I guessed that he was Hook. The old guy hummed to himself while the losers waited, looking nervous to be so far out of their element. We started filling our gas can at the side of the garage. The priest paid Hook before we could stop him. Nice guy, but a little much with the charity.

The funny thing is we thought the hardest part of the trip would be at the campus, tracking down some kind of bloodsucker. We didn't find a damn thing. Turns out trouble found us, eventually. We had no idea where we'd stopped or what was nearby.

I don't know where they came from. It doesn't really matter, I guess. We just heard screams coming from inside the garage. The women ran out, completely losing their shit. That's when we saw the first dead thing. It lunged after one of the women and caught her by the hair. The sounds coming from inside the garage told me there were more of the things, and that priest and the others were probably dead.

Who knew how many of them there were inside? I wasn't going to find out. What I did know was that outside were just Howie and me.

I went to grab him by the arm and drag him inside the grimy little store attached to the garage. Fucking Howie tore himself free and went to help the caught woman. She was dead already. He just couldn't see it — or wouldn't.

That's when I was caught completely by surprise — again. The priest came around the corner, fast, from inside the garage. He was wild-eyed and white as a sheet, a dead thing on his tail. The fat ass crashed right into Howie. I saw Howie try to catch himself, but the dead thing turned on him, slashing. That's when Howie did that stunt again. He threw the corpse off him — hard — like he was really strong all of a sudden. I'd only seen it once before.

I stopped the priest, who seemed to actually be getting his shit together, and gave Howie a hand up. Once I had

them both, I hauled them into the store, slammed the door and threw the old lock. It was only then that I realized Howie's shirt was covered in his own blood. He looked me in the eye, terrified, and fell to his knees.

I didn't even notice that the dead things outside had come to the store window. I only broke my stare at Howie when they started smashing out the glass. Give it to Father Fatass — he snapped me out of it. He'd found a bat somewhere behind the counter and offered it to me.

We both saw the heavy fire door with the "Restroom" sign at the same time. I grabbed the bat from him and yelled for help with Howie. Together, we dragged him into the bathroom. We barely got Howie inside and left him on the stained floor, a blood streak trailing behind us. I think he was already dead. The priest fell backward onto the toilet, leaving me standing near the door. I locked it, too, for what good it would do us.

I didn't even realize how tight I was gripping the bat until it started shaking in my hands. Or maybe it was me. I felt like I could snap it in two if I wanted.

I shot a look to the priest. He shouldn't have been taking it all so well. No one I'd seen ever had, at least not till I met Howie.

The priest was muttering something, holding Howie's hand and praying, smoothing back his hair. He spoke softly and gently: "Father in Heaven, look upon your son and have mercy...." He seemed to think the dead man on the floor was listening or something.

Then the things were at the door, pounding and screeching, bending the metal. That's when I lost it and desecrated the priest's prayer with my barf.

The panic and anger in me clashed. They were so intense that I had flashes of impulses. For a second, I wanted to swing at the fat ass, shut him up, scream at him for bringing us here. But I couldn't. My throat was acid-raw. "What does God have to do with it?" I wanted to shout.

I had to get out of there, but how? I was like a bug in a jar. Howie was gone, fucking rots were trying to get in, and the fat bastard just kept rambling, "Our Father who art in Heaven...."

I looked up and found my own kind of salvation: a ventilation shaft in the wall, above the toilet. If I stood on the john, I could pull the grate off and climb through. I pushed the fat ass aside, jumped up and grabbed the grille. It came away easy and fell to the floor.

The priest recovered from his shock and confusion over what I was doing. I looked at him victoriously and saw the sick moment in his eyes as he realized he could never fit through the opening.

I don't know why I hesitated. Maybe it was the shock of watching a death sentence pass through another person's consciousness. I just froze as we stared at each other.

Louder sounds of the door bending and groaning broke our trance. It wouldn't hold. In counterpoint to the scream-

ing metal, the priest turned silently to face me again. I was stunned to see an odd sort of peace on his face.

"Go." It was barely a whisper.

"But..."

"Go!"

Suddenly, there was no more question. I tried to pull myself up to the small opening. I slipped, cutting my hand deeply. As I hung there momentarily, I turned my head sort of expecting help. He didn't see. His head was bowed. I guess he was praying.

Pulling myself up again, I made it this time. But before I crawled too far to see, I bent my neck to look back. The priest had squared up to the door, pressing his full weight against it. He was so out of shape, I heard him groan. But impossibly, he held it closed just long enough for me to wriggle through to another loose vent, and then outside.

I'll never forget the last of it. I finally heard the door crash open. There was a shout, "Out of the depths, oh Lord, I cry to thee." And then screams.

### TRUE FAITH AND HUNTER

How many truly faithful people do you know? Lots of people say they believe in some form of supreme truth, in a metaphysical paradigm, but how committed to it are they? When polled, roughly 90 percent of Americans say they believe in some form of god, but how much and how deeply do they invest in that belief? To what extent? What are they willing to do to live by and defend those values? Can they work miracles? Can they turn water into wine? Loaves into fishes? Can they part the Red Sea? Can they heal the terminally ill by touching them or praying with them? Can they speak in foreign or spirit languages that they don't consciously know? Or maybe control the weather?

Without being too analytical, we know that many people belong to churches, synagogues or mosques and follow a variety of doctrines. The followers of any metaphysical system of thought often believe deeply in its tenets and teachings. Maybe you even have friends who believe that their particular doctrine is the primary principle. Their beliefs influence their lives so intensely that debate about it is upsetting or even insulting to them. In a diverse and egalitarian world, we expect that people respect one another's primary principles. Unfortunately, we don't live in a particularly tolerant or egalitarian world. Ultimately, it comes down to a choice. One person's Truth — capital "T" — is another person's Bullshit — capital "B." And when it comes to faith as a way of life, philosophical compromise is considered a renunciation of self.

Extraordinary faith or True Faith, for Hunter purposes, can be defined as the kind of deep, per-



sonal connection to one's religious beliefs that inspires an ability to affect the world around you. In game terms, a character possessing True Faith might be able to perform miracles, use spiritual determination to protect himself and others, or heal wounds and endow others with the ability to perform wondrous feats. When confronting supernatural forces that are the very antithesis of his core beliefs, a truly faithful person might inflict psychological or physical harm upon those creatures with his very presence or touch. Some of the other Storyteller games set in the World of Darkness make such validation of belief an actual game mechanic that *quantifies* religious belief. They make it a veritable superpower.

But can ordinary people really do these things?

It's very unlikely that they can. Without stepping on anyone's metaphysical toes, or gainsaying anyone's primary principles, we can probably all agree that we haven't encountered that kind of faith in anyone we've met. Because we're ordinary people, and hunters are ordinary people, it stands to reason that few to no hunters possess any kind of "True Faith" Trait.

"Okay," you might think, "then how come I see stories about people exhibiting stigmata, healing powers or faith-based psychic abilities?" Yeah, the news carries those stories, and they may or may not be true in each case, but how many of those people live next door to us? How many of them do we work with daily? How many of these miracles have we witnessed personally? How many examples of ordinary people in recent years can you name who have extraordinary faith? If we saw True Faith at work, would we believe it when we saw it or would we write it off as coincidence, hysteria or sleight of hand? If your next-door neighbor attempted to fix her pickup truck with no help from anything but her belief in God, would you pray with her or jeer at her? Then, if she succeeded, would you believe what you had seen came from a Supreme Being or would you fear her?

Sure, we can name a few people in history with deep abiding faith. How did we respond to those people when they manifested such faith? Were they treated with reverence, doubt or fear? Take Joan of Arc, for example. History tells us that Joan was a young peasant girl who, allegedly at the behest of angelic voices, led the armies of France to protect the sovereignty of the French Dauphin and won a decisive victory over the English at Orleans. In the end, the English had the final word on the "truth" of her claims and burned her as a heretic.

Do you think anyone you know would have the will and faith to live a life like Mother Teresa's? There aren't many arguments against the fact that Mother

Teresa was an extraordinary example of a person with deep, abiding faith. But can you identify any miracles attributed to her? Moreover, Mother Teresa died owning nothing but a rosary, a pair of glasses and some sandals, things that she wore and used every day. She lived caring for the sick and destitute of Calcutta because her religious determination told her that's what God wanted her to do. Have you ever seen a picture of Mother Teresa in which she wasn't smiling? Most people would at least feel a little resentful that they didn't have even the most basic comforts of life. Look around your neighborhood and ask yourself whether you really believe that anyone you know, even the most devout, would have the strength, courage and selflessness to live that way. Better yet, ask yourself that question.

Well, now that we're all discouraged, now that we all feel truly rotten about what wretchedly poor examples of humanity we are, understand that *we are human beings*. People are weak, selfish, doubting creatures capable of incredible atrocity and incredible hatred. We're also capable of incredible love and sacrifice. The argument comes full circle, then, because *hunters are human beings* and they all have that same potential. Hunters fear, they doubt, they scrabble to stay alive, to keep their families safe. They yell at God and sometimes they even pray to Him. So, while it's not necessarily believable to enact the part of a hunter with the ability to call down celestial lightning against monsters, it's perfectly believable to play a character with some sort of faith — small "f."

So, how do you translate all that philosophy into playing a hunter with realistic faith and not True Faith? Simple: You give her some. If you want to roleplay a hunter with strong spirituality, the kind of spirituality that gives her quiet strength and conviction, but not super powers, pick a doctrine that seems right for her. Learn as much as you can about it. Use faith not as a tool for the hunt, but as a motivation to hunt. Use it as a source of comfort and even a source of conflict.

Suppose you play a rabbi who's single. You're dating a woman whom you really care about. Then the Messengers imbue you with the knowledge that creatures of darkness hide among humanity. The Messengers have empowered you but have given you only a few tools with which to confront the truth. Soon, you're swept up in a new, terrifying life. You're hurt and almost killed, more than once. Perhaps a few defenseless people die because you couldn't save them. You believe you've failed. All these experiences give you some thoroughly compelling reasons to question your continued existence, and your understanding of humanity's relationship to God.

The woman in your life notices the changes in you, recognizes the distance between you and realizes that she loves you. She wants to be connected to you, to share your life rather than lose you. You want to believe that somewhere in that silence you pray to daily, God waits with an explanation of why He tests you. Are these "Messengers" really God? You first believed God had changed you. But you've seen too many people die to be sure. Does your love for your girlfriend come from God? How can you possibly marry her when faced with all this uncertainty?

No concrete answer comes to you. That would be too simple (not to mention unrealistic). But finally, through prayer and reflection, through exercising your connection to your core beliefs, you're struck with the epiphany that everything in life is a leap of faith. God doesn't guarantee certainty or safety, prosperity or penury. Through these realizations, you find the strength to go on against the monsters, to admit to the woman and to yourself that you love her, to connect with her more profoundly than you would have without all the fear, doubt and trial — because you put your faith in the hope that everything will work out for the best.

This character's story reflects the kind of faith that real people can have, even in an unreal, horrific setting such as the World of Darkness. If you want to play such a person with realistic faith, all you have to do is invest the thought and consideration into your character. And if you really want your character to draw strength and direction — but not the capacity to perform miracles — from his faith, you could capture that inspiration and determination in a Merit.

Merits are extra Traits that can be assigned to hunters. They're common to all of the Storyteller games, and rules for **Hunter**'s are provided on p. 101. The following is one more to add to the list of other mundane, realistic qualities that the imbued can have as ordinary people.

#### **RELIGIOUS DEVOTION (1- TO 3-PT MERIT)**

Your character has strong belief in a particular religious doctrine, the intensity of which is reflected in the Merit rating you choose. This belief gives your hunter strength, comfort and calm in trying times. His devotion grants 1 to 3 additional Willpower points when he's tested, when he must perform a challenging act, or when he needs confidence to succeed at an action. Your character probably prays or asks for guidance in these moments. You then have a separate pool of Willpower points that you may draw upon for the remainder of the scene.

These points must be spent in efforts that support or affirm your character's devotion, such as saving

another person's life, lifting a heavy object or controlling his own fear. They cannot be squandered on selfish acts or petty efforts. In essence, if a point is used to perform an act that runs counter to the teachings or values of your character's faith, perhaps to save himself or to lash out in unjustified anger, he has probably applied his devotion in vain. You and the Storyteller must agree about what is an appropriate circumstance in which you may spend one of your bonus Willpower points.

When points are squandered or used inappropriately, your character may have strayed from his faith. For major transgressions, he might lose his sense of self and connection to his beliefs, temporarily or even permanently. Your character loses this Merit and even additional points of his Willpower rating. Subtle transgressions such as cursing your Creator (if your belief system includes one) for the injustices of the world and losing faith as a result, deny your character access to a point or more of his Religious Devotion until he pays emotional penance or reconciles his beliefs.

In general, Religious Devotion can be called upon once per chapter (game session). It may be summoned more frequently under particularly demanding or appropriate circumstances — say to save someone's life or to put your character directly in harm's way — but the Storyteller must agree.

#### **USING TRUE FAITH**

It's not for us to insist that you cannot use True Faith in **Hunter**. It's your game and you can do with it what you want. If the Religious Devotion Merit just doesn't cut it for you, and the Storyteller agrees that your character can have True Faith, you can find the rules for it in other Storyteller supplements such as **The Hunters Hunted** and **The Inquisition**. Those books cover it pretty well, so there's no reason to repeat the Trait here.

But before you write "True Faith" on your character sheet, ask yourself whether you're taking it for the extra powers and die rolls that it gives you, or because that Trait is the only game mechanism that can capture the staggering faith your character has in a higher power. If she absolutely has to be able to perform miracles based on belief alone, then go for it. If you're not so certain anymore, consider defining your character's edges as the miracles she can perform. Maybe she believes the Creator has chosen her to contend with monsters because of her undying devotion and has bequeathed miraculous powers upon her as a reward.

All that said, we can still help you introduce True Faith into your game if you really want it. True Faith is the kind of devotion that's trivialized in

monster movies and that's lived by saints. Your character's role as a hunter with True Faith is going to be more *reactive* than *proactive*. He's basically a conduit of heavenly forces, just as edges make your hunter a conduit of the Messengers' gifts and mission. But you shouldn't think of True Faith as just another set of edges. It's much more powerful and meaningful than that. While some hunters believe that their edges come from the Heralds, they don't usually *worship* the Heralds. True Faith comes from God, however your character names his deity. A character with all-encompassing belief in the power of God is not able to act the same way that other hunters do. Every decision he makes and every action he takes has to uphold and assert his belief system and all its appurtenant moral baggage.

#### CREEDS AND TRUE FAITH

You can make an argument that a hunter of any creed could have True Faith. To a certain extent, that's true. You must be careful to make sure that certain typical behaviors of a creed aren't antithetical to your character's chosen religious following, however.

Suppose that you play a saintly Christian who believes in the good of humanity, and who is capable of incredible feats by virtue of her devotion. Now suppose that she's imbued by the Messengers, perhaps because her compassion and resolution make her a candidate to contend with monsters. You decide she's a Defender, who protects the best in humanity thanks to her religious calling, and who now simply protects humanity against the demons that walk the Earth. That combination of creed and True Faith works. In fact, creed and True Faith amplify and coincide with each other.

Now, what if your saintly Defender decided that her imbued calling was to protect Christianity itself? On the surface, that mission seems to reconcile creed and True Faith. But what if being a guardian of the religion means destroying all the monsters that would attack it, its followers and its facilities, and it means tearing down any who would disparage the religion? Where is the line drawn between True Faith and all the compassion and forgiveness that comes with it, and the compulsions of carrying out a harrowing agenda against an enemy? Although Defender and True Faith seem to mesh together well, they can also clash.

What about Martyrdom? Christ died on the cross to absolve our sins and save our souls. What greater blending of creed and True Faith could you imagine? And yet, Martyrdom's basic concept accepts that a hunter will be killed in the course of the hunt. Deep down, your character senses that he will give his life for the cause one day. Is that tantamount to suicide? Is suicide considered in keeping with your character's belief system? How can you play a devout character

who is prepared to defy the tenets of his religion at any time?

How about Redemption? Monsters are horrific to many hunters, but not always to Redeemers. They see something salvageable, something in need of saving in monsters, no matter how small or how deeply buried. The concept of redemption is prevalent in most religions. Christ forgave the thieves hanging crucified next to Him. A Redeemer with True Faith probably has to be just as forgiving. He has to be able to pardon almost any transgression, perhaps even the vilest. Is it humanly possible to forgive a creature that kills and feeds on children and the helpless? Can any person, no matter how devout, forgive such crimes? In a way, the combination of Redemption and True Faith may demand too much of any hunter. Sooner or later, a Redeemer would understand that his faith demands that a creature's sins be pardoned, but find himself unable to be the pardoner.

Once you investigate the lengths and degrees to which the creeds can be taken, almost all can seem irreconcilable with True Faith in some way. If you want your character to have the Trait, you have to consider how he interprets his calling in the hunt, and you must decide limits beyond which he refuses to go in pursuing the hunt. Creed tenets may coincide with True Faith's dictates for the most part, but sooner or later they clash, and you must decide which is more important to your character — his faith or his agenda. If he defies his religious devotion, he undermines the very foundation of his life and understanding of the world. If he defies his creed, he compromises what he believes must be done to save humanity from monstrous oppression. There are no obvious courses in these situations, only choices based on your character's identity and the necessity of living with those decisions.

#### THE BURDEN OF TRUE FAITH

How would you feel if you were suddenly made the conduit of heavenly power, justice or retribution? Would you go out for a burger afterward, as if nothing had happened, or would you hide in your bathroom, shaking and crying at the manifestation of your deity's existence and expectation? You have become an immediate and necessary vessel! If you answer "the burger," True Faith might not be for you.

A character with True Faith is a medium of her god's power and is possibly even that deity's prophet. Such a character wouldn't be able to shake the impact and burden of the celestial connection as if it were an annoyance. She'd beg to know, "Why me?" She'd demand answers from above. She'd suffer hallucinations and ailments and might even go into utter denial. She might revel in the fact that she has been chosen, but it would still be an all-encompassing,

overwhelming emotional experience. And it would take her a lifetime to come to grips with the responsibility, assuming she ever could.

Ironically, the same emotional impact and sense of burden strikes many people when they're imbued. The imbued are chosen as the vessels of some unknown power (maybe God) and seemingly charged with a mission to contend with *the truth*. The imbuing is also a life-changing experience. It, too, can inaugurate feelings of unworthiness and doubt. So, there is actually a parallel between being the subject of True Faith and being imbued.

And yet, there is a difference in the scope of being imbued and having True Faith. Hunters are invested with mysterious capabilities that they can usually activate at will—even if they don't understand how or why they can do so. Although each hunter is assigned a creed, that classification is more of a convenient handle to define his personality and motives than it is a social classification. A hunter's personality and creed indicate how he generally responds to monsters, and he can act on those impulses. He can make a mark on the supernatural by calling upon a power. Hunters are therefore capable of being proactive in their calling.

True Faith is less proactive and more reactive. The (literally) faithful person puts all his confidence in something larger than himself—and in his perceived relationship with that deity. The devout character has no power unto himself that does not come from that deity, and the ability to perform miracles is less an act of will than a supplication to make an event happen. True Faith therefore comes with acceptance of a certain amount of helplessness. Whereas the imbued can make a difference when and how they want to, people with True Faith must essentially ask permission to make a difference.

Creating a hunter with True Faith therefore demands an amalgamation of two mindsets and outlooks: that of the hunter, who acts now and apologizes later, and the faithful person, who asks permission before doing anything. These two philosophies inevitably clash in your character when he sees the opportunity to act and achieve greater good, but feels duty bound to behave with the proper respect for his deity and not be presumptuous. It's a difficult juggling act, and one that puts more pressure on a person than does either being imbued or having True Faith alone.

Pay attention to this weighing of identities when creating your faithful hunter and maintain a perspective on it throughout your chronicle. Hunter and religious compulsions are usually balanced only when the demands of each are met with the same actions. More often, your character has to decide which side

of his identity he must favor in any circumstance, depending on which seems to fulfill the greater good or achieves the highest goals your character upholds. And if the demands of True Faith or being imbued begin to outweigh the others, you might ask yourself who and what your character becomes.

#### THE STORYTELLER AND TRUE FAITH

There are established rules for True Faith. The Trait works in certain ways so that it can be used in a game. Your Storyteller isn't forced into presenting your character's True Faith in one specific way or in a particular fashion, however. Acts of True Faith don't have to involve a parting of clouds and light beaming down from Heaven. He can make them seem almost like coincidental events that help your character significantly, and that significance is what makes your hunter wonder whether God really does take an active hand in his life. Certainly, given the mundane, low-key themes of *Hunter*, the latter portrayal of True Faith integrates the Trait more seamlessly into the game.

Suppose your character has lost a monster's trail. He's furious and desperate, because someone's life hangs in the balance. Your hunter searches for other leads and sources, but comes up dry. He's running out of time and knows that if he can't do something, the consequences will be staggering.

In need of clarity, rather than out of mere necessity, your character turns to prayer. He focuses his thoughts and calls upon that reserve of comfort and strength that prayer gives him. He reaches out to that place where his faith tells him God resides. Nothing happens. Your character finds no inspiration and feels no better. Instead, he feels utterly alone and ineffectual.

The appointed hour comes and goes, and your hunter still hasn't come any closer to resolving his dilemma. He knows something has gone incredibly wrong. His prayer turns from a pleading "how" to an almost angry and bewildered litany of "why."

As your character, feeling defeated, returns home, he passes a newspaper stand. A headline strikes him as odd and attracts his attention. Suddenly, he knows where to go next to resume his pursuit of the creature. He missed his opportunity to stop it once, but now he knows how to proceed and maybe how to make amends for his previous shortcoming. Spotting the headline and being inspired by it is a one-in-a-thousand occurrence, but it happens—and your character thinks he knows why. God works in mysterious ways. It is not for us to try to understand Him. It's for us to do His work.

Remember that playing a hunter with True faith is an ongoing compromise between you and your Storyteller. Having a personal connection to a Supreme Being doesn't provide your character with all the answers—any more than being imbued does.



RAYBEL 01

# CHAPTER 3: NEW TRAITS

*That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

— Ecclesiastes 3:15

Although you can play any kind of person you want in **Hunter**, whether a soldier, spy, demolitions expert, auto mechanic or mail carrier, the game endorses the last kinds of characters — regular, everyday folks. Those kinds of people are suggested as characters because they offer a truly rewarding, horrific roleplaying event. They have very little to no experience of the world beyond the one in which they live, and so they are hardly prepared for the extraordinary existence into which they are thrust after the imbuing. In contrast, characters who have lived dynamic, adventurous — and certainly not mundane — lives *before* are better prepared for amazing and dynamic events *after*, even if exposure to the supernatural is still a little out of their league.

One of the most important parts of creating a human character — especially a work-a-day one — is creating his or her origins and life. Your innovations here establish who your character was and still is at the prelude, and they help indicate who she might become after being changed. Her values, beliefs and philosophies about life before become her guides for life after, because in the wake of the imbuing, hunters have almost no other means by which to understand and interpret what they witness, experience and endure.

This chapter presents the classic Storyteller system Merits and Flaws, “**Hunter** style.” It also addresses Backgrounds and how they can change over the course of your chronicle. All these types of Traits focus on who your character used to be, and how those Traits affect that person after she knows the truth.

## MERITS & FLAWS

*Jeff surveyed the assembled posers and wannabes crowding the riverside gallery, and smiled to himself. He'd judged it just right. His outfit allowed him to blend perfectly with the losers attending the opening. If they only knew he'd bought it cheap from a thrift shop, not from some big-name designer.*

*He focused his mind on the job in hand. He made sure his mobile phone was still on, then scoured the crowd for the target. As usual, he was the bait. There she was, lurking in the corner, watching the crowd and subtly not drinking from her wineglass. He stared at her that way. A look of bloodlust flashed across her face but wasn't really there. She had to be the one the others had described.*

*They'd been tracking her for weeks. Now they had her cornered. Sure, there were a lot of people around, but it was dark and the gallery was isolated. It would take the police time to get here.*

Jeff caught her eye, smiled and then turned away. Gotcha, he thought. Sure enough, she studied him with interest and walked over. Jeff felt the first pricklings of fear and a bead of sweat trickled down his back. Banishing the nervousness from his face, he turned to the monster and gave her his most appealing grin. I am such a two-faced bastard, he thought.

\* \* \*

Jason paced impatiently, one ear to his mobile phone. "We should never have let Talbot sneak in the back way. Jeff's already in trouble. Talbot's just making it worse."

Serena, who sat on the grass of the nearby park, grunted noncommittally as she concentrated on her laptop.

"Witness! already has Talbot's new stuff up on Unity," she mumbled, almost to herself.

Apparently she's using the Internet, Jason thought, but Lord only knows how she's doing it. There wasn't even a wire between her computer and mobile phone. I don't understand the bloody thing and never will, he cursed to himself.

"Okay," she said suddenly. "I've finished uploading the details on this bitch to hunter-net. If we don't make it, SixofSwords29 promises to get some people together."

Jason snorted. "That pompous ass? He's been a waste of space since his bloody psycho killed Jacob."

Silence fell between the two but was quickly broken by Serena. "Anything from Jeff yet?" she asked, determined not to let Jason dredge up bad memories.

"No... hang on... yes. He's talking to her."

Jason stopped pacing and listened to his phone for a moment. Serena quickly put her laptop into a bag and checked her pistol.

"She's inviting him into a back room. We need to move quickly if anything goes wrong."

"Any ideas on how we get in?" she asked.

Jason scanned the immediate area, searching for inspiration. His eyes settled on the parking lot, and a grin spread across his face. "I have an idea."

\* \* \*

"This is the piece I thought might interest you," the bloodsucker said, smiling as she gestured toward a tarpaulin-covered object in the middle of the room.

Jeff looked at the covering and tried to discern what was hidden beneath it. The object came to about chest height and was a few feet across. "What is it?" he asked with genuine curiosity in his voice. What the hell sort of art did a monster make, anyway?

The bloodsucker gestured to the black-clad thug who served as her bodyguard, and he pulled away the tarpaulin. It took Jeff every ounce of his composure to keep from reacting. Underneath was a bloodied and beaten Talbot, tied to a chair. He looked unconscious... or dead.

"I call it 'Intruder Alert,'" the dead woman said. Jeff turned to face her, his gaze steely and his anger controlled only by his fear.

"Really?" he asked. "A bit tasteless, don't you think?"

The bloodsucker laughed. "I suspect I will find him quite tasty," she said. "Now, stay where you are."

Jeff could feel the words pressing at his mind with the same insistence as hunger or lust. He silently thanked whoever or whatever had changed him for the protection they gave. He held his position, though, waiting for the right moment to take her by surprise. The damn guard was going to be a problem.

As the bloodsucker bent toward Talbot's neck, Jeff heard a noise come from outside the gallery. An engine, moving closer. Jason. Truck driver. Shit.

Jeff dove for cover as the mason blocks of the gallery wall burst inward. A white van crashed through, with a grim Jason and a terrified Serena visible through the windshield. As the van came to a halt, the guard pulled a gun and took aim. Jeff threw himself at the guy, the pain of contact fading behind the strength that suddenly coursed through him.

The bloodsucker, fangs bared, backed away from Talbot and hissed at the others in the van. Talbot, now conscious or having been all along, struggled to his feet, still tied to the chair, and clumsily tried to position himself behind the deader. What the hell is he doing? Jeff wondered. Then the guard punched him, and Jeff sank to the floor, his face exploding in pain.

Jason leaped from the van and charged the guard. Serena crouched behind the van's passenger door and fired at the vampire, sending her reeling. With a grunt of effort, Talbot, twisting his body around violently, swung the chair he was tied to at the bloodsucker, catching her across the midriff. A scream tore through the room as she fell to the floor.

Grim determination on his face, Talbot swung around again and sat down heavily, the chair legs driving into the fallen vampire. The chair collapsed under Talbot, unable to endure the energy that coursed through it. He fell onto the rot, who was reduced to a pile of ash.

"I don't bloody believe it! I killed a vampire with a chair," he said.

Jason landed a telling blow on the guard, who crumpled to the floor. Serena pointed her gun, hesitated, and then lowered it. The man wasn't even a bruise. He was just a dupe. He didn't deserve to die for that.

"Jason, get the car," Serena shouted, painfully aware of the sounds of panic from the gallery. It wouldn't be long until someone got the courage to investigate.

Jason nodded and dashed out through the gap in the wall. Talbot struggled free of the ropes and got to his feet. "Bloody hell. I killed a vampire with a chair!"

"Very impressive," Serena said. "Now help me with Jeff."

Talbot snapped out of his reverie and dashed over to help Serena pull Jeff to his feet. "What's happening?" Jeff mumbled.

"We're getting out of here," Serena said.

The three stumbled through the hole in the wall just as Jason pulled up, scattering the panicked guests outside. As the trio climbed in, Jason shouted, "Free the Leicester Four!" Then, he slammed the car into motion. That should confuse the press and police for a little while, he thought.

\* \* \*

Back at the apartment, Jason mumbled a passage from the Bible while clutching Talbot's head, and he was gratified to see the wound close up. Talbot pulled himself upright and looked at his friend. "Thanks, but I really don't know why you bother."

Jason snorted. "What I want to know is why you keep risking yourself. You're getting as bad as Jeff."

Talbot glanced at his friend. He shifted uncomfortably, scratching at his head where the wound had been. Then he turned to the others who worked busily about the apartment. They always looked to him for leadership. He couldn't keep his secret from them any longer.

"I have less to lose than the rest of you," he said.

"Oh, come on," Jason said. "I mean, you don't have a family, but you're important to us. You're the only one who seems to understand what's going on."

Talbot sighed heavily. This was going to be hard. "That's not it. I'm dying. I was diagnosed as terminally ill three years ago. I could be gone in a matter of months. Or it could be years. See what I mean?"

Jason stared at him.

## QUALITIES OF LIFE

Sometimes, the dots on a character sheet just don't cut it. You have a vision in mind of the character you want to play, but the **Hunter** rulebook's broad categories of Attributes and Abilities just don't capture all of the strengths and weaknesses that you want to portray.

That's where Merits and Flaws come in. These additional Traits combine with ones in the rulebook to let you add finishing touches to your character that make him complete and unique. By using them, you can help pin down the advantages and disadvantages that make your character a whole person — at least in game terms.

Merits are particular facets of your character or his lifestyle that were an advantage to him before the imbuing and that might aid him in the days and months to come as he struggles to free the world from the grip of monsters. Flaws are your character's failings or problems that hindered him in his previous life and that still challenge him now that he knows the truth.

If you're familiar with other games in the Storyteller system, you're probably familiar with Merits and Flaws. The ones for **Hunter** are a little different from the others, though. These qualities largely focus

on the mundane aspects of your character's life, the little things that help or hinder many of us in the real world. Your character might be a naturally talented liar and can use that gift to his advantage. Meanwhile, he might also have an ex-wife and be required to make alimony payments that diminish his income. These components help establish your character as a genuine, everyday person. What follows are some rules to help quantify him as such.

Many Merits and Flaws define aspects of your character that need to be explained in his origins or past. You and the Storyteller should work out the details, and the Storyteller can use those conditions or situations as inspiration for stories about your character and his life.

So, Merits and Flaws aren't presented here as a means to making your character a hunter badass. They help you to add individuality and detail to your character, making him a well-rounded, believable person.

Use of Merits and Flaws is purely optional. Your Storyteller may declare them off-limits in your chronicle.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Here's how Merits and Flaws work. You can usually choose them only during character creation. Merits have a cost, allowing you to buy them with freebie points. Taking Flaws gives you their rating as bonus freebie points, in addition to the ones you already receive during character creation. You can buy as many Merits for your character as you wish, providing you have enough freebie points to do so, but you may take no more than seven points worth of Flaws. That gives you a maximum freebie pool of 28 freebie points to spend, if you take the maximum number of Flaws. Extra freebie points gained from Flaws can be spent to acquire anything that can be purchased with freebies, such as Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds — or Merits.

The Storyteller has to agree if you want to assign Merits and Flaws to your character after your chronicle is already under way. Normally, you need to have some freebie points still left over from character creation do go this route. The Storyteller might decree that the only freebie points you can spend on Merits must originate from any Flaws you take, up to the seven limit. Thus, if you choose four points of Flaws for your established character, you could choose up to four points of Merits. Freebie points gained from Flaws after play has begun can be spent on only Merits — not on Abilities or Attributes or Backgrounds — and these Traits can be acquired only one time after the chronicle has started. You can't go back to the Merit-and-Flaw well repeatedly during your chronicle.

Traits chosen during play should reflect who your character has proved to be thus far, perhaps with a few qualities such as a terminal illness to be revealed or exposed in future stories. They could also be chosen based on what your character has experienced on the hunt. Essentially, if you use Merits and Flaws after play has begun, don't suddenly change your hunter into someone or something he wasn't before. A hunter who is perfectly healthy one day wouldn't suddenly become hard of hearing the next, unless something unusual and tragic occurs in his life or in your stories.

## INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

Some but not all of these Merits and Flaws involve tangible systems benefits or disadvantages, such as increasing or decreasing the difficulty numbers of particular rolls. These mechanics help make your character's genuinely human identity an actual part of the game.

Other Traits involve no systems, which is not to say the latter kind are of no use. Quite the contrary. These "soft" Traits establish roleplaying guides for you or the Storyteller to take into account during a story. If they're integrated thoroughly into your game they can really enhance the story, allowing for a deeper level of realism as your character and the world interact.

Sometimes, a Flaw can make a story truly compelling. Just look at the number of flawed heroes in fiction and movies. Characters' imperfections are often the things that make them interesting. Similarly, a Merit can help explain aspects of your character's life that you otherwise might have trouble justifying narratively. For example, the hunt imposes great demands on a character, her social life, her friends and her job. An appropriate Merit can explain in game terms why her friends won't desert her, why her boss won't fire her or why her boyfriend won't leave her. Not to say that you couldn't explain these things yourself, but Merits and Flaws help make such character qualities identifiable.

## LOSING MERITS AND FLAWS

As your chronicle continues and your character pursues the hunt, the inspiration, explanation or justification for some of his Merits and Flaws might change. He might undergo corrective surgery for a physical impairment, for example. The negated Trait is usually withdrawn, and it's up to you and the Storyteller to decide how to reassign freebie points. Sooner or later, the points from an alleviated Flaw must manifest in other disabilities or disadvantages, usually dictated by ongoing story events. If your character's Chronic Illness (4-pt Flaw) is alleviated,

you have four freebie points to reassign to Flaws. These new challenges can be related to your old one — say, your character is now Medicated (as a 1-pt Flaw) to remain healthy. Or Flaws can be completely new and unique. Multiple low-level Flaws can replace the lost one, or a single equally rated Flaw can be acquired. The Storyteller must approve the choice of a new Flaw, or she might decide one for your character based on story events. She might not even tell you what your new Flaw is for some time, until it becomes clear during unfolding events.

The freebie points liberated by a lost Merit should also be reassigned based on chronicle events. Sooner or later, your character gains some new kind of advantage. Freebie points made available by a lost Merit must be spent on other Merits. They can't be spent to gain more Attributes, Abilities or Backgrounds in play.

## CATEGORIES

Merits and Flaws are divided into groups.

### SOCIAL

Hunting isn't just about having a big gun. To succeed and survive, the imbued have to interact with society, to ferret out the monsters hiding among humanity, to deal with the consequences of the calling and often to maintain some pretense of a normal life. This category catalogs potential social benefits or problems that your character may have.

### PHYSICAL

A hunter's body is the one tool at his disposal at all times. This category deals with the advantages and disadvantages inherent to the corporal frame.

### MENTAL

A hunter's mind is just as much part of her armory as is her body. This category deals with internal cognitive abilities and states that help or hinder the hunt.

### LEGAL

Hunters can't just step out of society and do what they want, as much as many would like to do so. They must conform to society's laws or deal with the world from behind bars — or while fleeing the authorities. Most hunters' dealings with the legal system are challenging, to say the least (see "Law and Order," p. 187). This category presents you with options that make these confrontations less difficult... or much more complicated.

### ECONOMIC

Money makes the world go 'round, but single-minded pursuit of it is also the root of all evil, or so the clichés go. It's damn hard to live without money, and even worse to try to hunt without it. This category explores the financial advantages or disadvantages your character may face.

**MERITS**

Claudia scribbled quickly in her notebook as Matze talked. Stefan and Andreas hung on his every word, as usual. While Matze was a "doer" at heart, he could still talk up a storm.

He quickly outlined a plan to trap and destroy the rot that had been stalking Claudia for the last few weeks. It was a good plan, if a little dangerous. Luckily, the streets near where she lived were lively enough at night that a small scuffle wouldn't draw much attention. They happened frequently, whenever young men and drunks decided to prove themselves. Of course, she had known it was good plan from its inception, which was why Matze adopted it as his own once she first suggested it.

"Stefan, are you sure your brother doesn't mind you borrowing his car?" Matze asked.

Stefan nodded. "He's fine. He trusts me. I haven't damaged it yet. He never asks where I take it."

"Good," Matze said. "Claudia, are you sure the thing is going to be in the bar on Wednesday night?"

She nodded. "I spent a while gossiping with some of its kind. They said he's been talking about me for some time."

Matze grunted. "Everybody be here on time tomorrow night."

**SOCIAL****APPROACHABLE (1-PT MERIT)**

There's something very inviting and nonthreatening about you. People find you very easy to start a conversation with. Even distrustful creatures tend to put aside their instinctive wariness of mortals in regard to you. Reduce the difficulty of any Empathy rolls involving other people or hunters by two, and by one when human-seeming monsters are concerned.

**EARLY ADOPTER (1-PT MERIT)**

"Wow! Look at that new palmtop computer. I just gotta have one." You want to have the latest gadgets and technology. It's a drain on your cash, and your apartment is cluttered with some neat technology that never made it, but you have a solid sense of how to use the latest gadgets. You quickly understand and use most new consumer-level technology. Not only that, you have a great collection of stuff that can be useful on the hunt. Add two dice to any Technology roll when trying to figure out how to use an unfamiliar device.

**FUNNY (1-PT MERIT)**

You can make people laugh. Your timing and sense of the absurd are second to none. You're always being invited to parties because you're so much fun. However, you're also very good at judging the appropriateness of your humor. Sometimes, the right joke can lift the spirits of people when everything seems to be going against them. So, you do what you can to make life more bearable for your

fellow imbued, even when the situation seems darkest. Lower the difficulty of any Social roll intended to boost morale by two.

**GOOD LISTENER (1-PT MERIT)**

You're interested in people, you enjoy hearing what they have to say and you're prepared to hear them out without interrupting their opinion with your own. Others can sense this and open up to you without really meaning to. The difficulty of all apparently friendly Social rolls that involve people talking to your character is reduced by two.

**GOOD TASTE (1-PT MERIT)**

You have a knack for choosing the right food from the menu, telling the right anecdotes and giving the right presents. You've seen the right films for discussion in cultured company, and you wouldn't know who starred in *Dumb and Dumber*, let alone have the first clue about the plot. Your taste makes forging social contacts among the similar folk much easier, whatever your origins. Lower the difficulty of any Social roll intended to gain acceptance or to impress in a like-minded gathering by two.

**GOSSIP (1-PT MERIT)**

You're an incurable gossip, and other gossips recognize a kindred spirit in you. You're more than happy to spend hours shooting the breeze with others, all the while discussing the minutiae of other people's lives. Surprising how much information you can pick up that way, isn't it? Lower the difficulty of any Interrogation rolls made in a social situation, without bullying or intimidation, by two.

**LOVESTRUCK (1-PT MERIT)**

You've fallen for someone and the feeling is reciprocated. The world seems a better place. Colors are brighter, music is more enchanting and the hunt seems less desperate. Even the slightest success boosts your confidence. Unlike *Hunter Book: Judge's Soulmate* Background, this love may be a transitory thing. If you don't maintain the relationship, you may lose this Merit at the Storyteller's discretion. Even if it lasts, you don't feel the same deep connection as with Soulmate. Regain two Willpower instead of one when you wake up each morning.

**MEDIA JUNKIE (1-PT MERIT)**

TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, films — you love them all and can't get enough. You're a voracious consumer of pop culture and are always up on the latest movies, music and current affairs. Lower the difficulty of any Social or Research roll that involves pop culture by two.

**NATURAL LEADER (1-PT MERIT)**

You have been gifted with a certain bearing and personality that naturally make people defer to your opinion or orders. You receive two extra dice on



Leadership rolls. You must have a Charisma of 3 or greater to purchase this Merit.

#### **NATURAL POLITICIAN (1-PT MERIT)**

You're right at home among the devious minds of the political world. Whether it's the cut and thrust of office jockeying or the showboating of regional politics, you know how to get what you want. You receive two extra dice on Manipulation rolls in social situations that involve an element of politics, such as an office meeting or gun-club gathering. You must have a Manipulation of 3 or more to have this Merit. Politics and Bureaucracy Abilities have no bearing on application of this Merit because it represents raw talent, not the knowledge gained through long experience.

#### **PUNCTUAL (1-PT MERIT)**

You're a master of the virtually lost art of arriving on time. If you have a meeting at 10 AM, you're sitting in the reception area 9:59. If you have an 8 PM dinner date with your beloved, you'll be in the restaurant at 8 on the dot. Barring deliberate interference in your plans, you almost always manage things so you turn up on time. It makes you a great organizer, assuming your allies come through for you.

#### **SMOOTH (1-PT MERIT)**

You might come from the wrong side of the tracks. You probably don't have a clue which fork to use when eating out. But none of that matters. You present yourself with such an easy grace and carefree attitude that people forgive you most errors. They might not like you much, but they enjoy your company so thoroughly that your rougher edges are quickly forgiven and forgotten. Lower the difficulty of any Manipulation roll by two.

#### **WAY WITH WORDS (1-PT MERIT)**

Language is a finely honed tool for you, not a blunt instrument. You are able to create exactly the effect you want by choosing your words carefully, in both written and verbal communication. Gain two dice on any Expression roll that involves words.

#### **BEST FRIEND (2-PT MERIT)**

You have the good fortune to have a best buddy. He stands with you through thick and thin. You've shared jokes, tragedies and all the highs and lows of life over the years, all of which has forged a bond between you that some married couples never achieve. Perhaps you were at school or worked together. Although you are not be able to share the details of your new life with your friend, you can rely on him to back you up to the best of his abilities and not to ask too many difficult questions. A best friend is closer to you and more committed to helping you than an Ally (see the Background of the same name, Hunter, p. 119),

but demands far more in return. He goes that extra mile to get you out of trouble, whereas an Ally wouldn't. But remember, your best friend counts on you to do the same for him — if not more.

#### **ENCHANTING VOICE (2-PT MERIT)**

You have the most captivating voice. There's a quality to it that makes people unable to ignore it. If you whisper seductive words in someone's ear, his heart melts. If you demand that someone do something, he springs into action at your behest. The difficulty of all rolls involving the use of your voice to persuade, seduce, charm or order is reduced by two.

#### **FASHION SENSE (2-PT MERIT)**

Your character doesn't just dress well, he has an innate sense of what sort of clothes suit a particular occasion. This isn't a case of slavishly following the latest trends from the hottest designers. It's a matter of knowing when to dress smart and when to be casual, and having the know-how to carry it off on a limited budget. Deduct one from the difficulty of Social rolls in situations in which dressing appropriately is important, such as in a business meeting, chatting at a club or attending an invitation-only function.

#### **FLIRTY (2-PT MERIT)**

You claim that you're a terrible flirt, but that quite manifestly isn't true. You're great at it. You're an absolute master at all the subtle signals that give off the particular combination of promise and denial that makes teasing so much fun. At your best, you can make members of the opposite sex, or members of the same sex, putty in your hands. Add two dice to all Social rolls in such circumstances.

#### **GOOD JUDGE OF CHARACTER (2-PT MERIT)**

You have an instinct for reading people. You can make an appraisal of the kind of person someone is after meeting her for a few seconds, based on little more than gut instinct. You're rarely wrong. Decrease the difficulty of any Perception roll based on assessing a person or human-seeming monster by two.

#### **GREAT LIAR (2-PT MERIT)**

Lying comes naturally to you. Even the most involved deception sounds like God's own truth when it comes tripping off your honeyed tongue. Gain two dice on any Social roll that involves lying to or deceiving another person or monster.

#### **LAID-BACK FRIENDS (2-PT MERIT)**

Everyone needs pals. You've got a particularly good bunch. They're pretty cool about when they get to see you; they don't get uptight if you're not in contact for a while. They're also great at not interfering with your life. Sure, you've gone through some changes of late, but that's your choice. They'll be there if you want to talk or need help, but they'll otherwise

stay out of your hair. If these guys are also your Allies (see **Hunter**, p. 119), they'll help you without asking too many difficult questions. Hey, your life, your business, right?

#### **PEOPLE PERSON (2-PT MERIT)**

You're a social animal. You just like being around others. Hell, they like being around you. Your open and gregarious nature makes people warm to you quickly. The difficulty of any Social roll to create a good impression on another is decreased by two.

#### **PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY (2-PT MERIT)**

You're a fine, upstanding person, respected by people around you. Through participation in local events, helping out with community groups or helping others, you've become well-liked and trusted by those who live around you. When you bring them a warning of potential danger or offer an explanation of strange events, they're likely to believe you. You may even be able to call upon their aid in a pinch. You may not get it, however. The Roots Background from **Hunter Book: Innocent** represents that sort of deep, committed relationship to a community. The upside is that this Merit does not carry the same level of obligation to the community that the Background does.

#### **SEASONED TRAVELER (2-PT OR 4-PT MERIT)**

You've visited distant and different places on your own, and you know how to fit in. You don't hit town expecting everyone to think and behave the way you do. With the 2-point version, you're adept at finding accommodation, supplies and local help wherever you go in your home country. With the 4-point version, the same applies to foreign countries. You might not speak the language of a place well, or at all, but you know how to go about obtaining things and learning about the local culture without offending the natives, through a combination of prior research and general street smarts.

#### **SOCIALLY AWARE (2-PT MERIT)**

Social interplay is an open book to you. You're the first to spot the hidden relationships between people, after only a few minutes of observation. Subtle clues like body language and position, voice tone and choice of words speak volumes to you about the underlying connections between people. Gain two dice on any Perception roll involving interaction between other people and/or human-seeming monsters.

#### **TRIVIA CHAMP (2-PT MERIT)**

Where do you get this stuff? Whether it's through plenty of reading, too much TV or just an eclectic bunch of friends, you have the oddest collection of facts stored away in your skull. Once in a while, at the Storyteller's discretion, one of them turns out to be just the piece of information your fellow hunters

need. You might not actually be very bright, but the sheer amount of knowledge you've picked up makes you appear that way. This Merit doesn't confer knowledge of the enemy or the occult, beyond what is likely to be known in common culture (and may well be dangerously wrong).

#### **UPRIGHT CITIZEN (2-PT MERIT)**

Up until the moment of your imbuing, you were a model citizen. There's never been even a whiff of scandal about you. Your working life has been good, without being extraordinary. Your friends would be hard-pressed to come up with any embarrassing secrets about you, and even your ex-lovers are complimentary about you most of the time. You just don't have any dirty secrets to come back to haunt you, and people who know you have a hard time believing anything bad about you.

#### **VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOOD (2-PT MERIT)**

You live in a part of the city where everything goes, and does so most of the time. The streets are fairly busy late at night and the inhabitants are up to all sorts of strange things, legal and not so legal. Whenever anything odd happens, people tend to dismiss it as just another part of the daily routine.

#### **CORPORATE SAVVY (3-PT MERIT)**

You've been a warrior on the cubicle battlefields for a long time, and you know how the corporate mind works. You understand the dynamics of money, business, information and power that make up companies, and you can manipulate them for your own ends to a limited degree. Add two dice to any roll involving manipulating a corporate structure or a corporate employee.

#### **MEDIA SAVVY (3-PT MERIT)**

There's a knack to dealing with the media, and you have it. You've learned what journalists want, and you do your best to provide it in a way that best suits you. You can create, suppress and redirect stories with a fair amount of effectiveness, just by the spin you put on them. Most of the time, you try to set up situations so the media reads them the way you want, say by making a hit on a monster look like drug-related violence. Add two dice to any Social rolls in which you deal with journalists or news organizations.

#### **SUPPORTIVE FAMILY (3-PT MERIT)**

Sure, you're acting strange. There's something going on that you can't or won't tell them about, but it's important to you. That much is clear. But, they're your family, they love you and they'll be there for you. They're sure you'll get around to telling them the whole truth sooner or later. Until then, they choose to trust you. Unless you have also taken your kin under the Allies Background, your family won't go out of the way to

help you. They just don't ask the questions that you can't answer.

#### **LUCKY (4-PT MERIT)**

You were born lucky. Since you were a kid, things have worked out your way. Maybe you took a job with a small firm just before the business went through the roof, leading to your rapid promotion. Or the one time you were dumped, the guy you had your eye on also split up and the two of you hooked up within weeks. Once per chapter (game session), the Storyteller may decrease the difficulty of a critical roll you make by two. If you succeed, it's because some random factor makes things easier for you.

You cannot start the game with both this Merit and the Fool's Luck Innocence edge. If you gain the edge in the course of the game, you may spend your four freebie points on other Merits that develop during the chronicle.

#### **PHYSICAL**

##### **ACUTE SENSE (1-PT MERIT)**

One of your senses, be it sight, smell, taste, touch or hearing is exceptionally keen. The difficulty of any roll involving this sense is decreased by two.

##### **GOOD RIGHT/LEFT HOOK (1-PT MERIT)**

The power of your punch belies your modest frame. Maybe you were a boxer for a while, or perhaps you've just been in a lot of fights. No matter the reason, people tend to fall over when you hit them. Add two dice to your damage roll for any Brawl-based attack.

##### **HOLLOW LEG (1-PT MERIT)**

You can drink like a fish. The amount of alcohol you can put away during a binge is truly phenomenal. What's more aggravating to your buddies is how little you suffer for it. Anyone who gets into a drinking competition with you quickly regrets it. Halve any penalties you suffer for consuming alcohol.

##### **LIGHT SLEEPER (1-PT MERIT)**

Although you sleep well, you are awakened quickly by a commotion. Any disturbance, from a poltergeist tossing objects around your room to a cat getting amorous on a neighboring rooftop awakens you immediately. Unlike possessing the Vigilance edge (*Hunter Book: Judge*) or the Endurance Trait (*Hunter Book: Defender*), you still need eight hours' sleep to function properly. You just wake up more easily than most.

##### **NATURAL RUNNER (1-PT MERIT)**

You've enjoyed running ever since you were a kid. Whereas most people wheeze and complain about exercising, running has always been an absolute pleasure for you. As a result, you can run like the wind when the situation demands it. Your Dexterity counts as one point higher than it actually is for purposes of determining Movement rates.

**PERFECT BALANCE (1-PT MERIT)**

Your sense of balance is superb. The narrowest of ledges holds little fear for you, because you have such a good command of your physical equilibrium. You're probably a good dancer, too. This Merit allows you to reduce the difficulty of all balance-related rolls by two.

**ROBUST HEALTH (1-PT MERIT)**

You have the constitution of an ox. You rarely get ill, if ever, and food poisoning is a stranger to you. You don't even get hangovers, you bastard. Reduce the difficulty of any roll to resist illness or poisoning — including alcohol poisoning — by two.

**SEA LEGS (1-PT MERIT)**

No landlubber, you're a salty sea dog at heart. You're at home on a boat, even when traveling rough seas. You suffer no penalty incurred due to rough seas or unpredictable ship motion on any actions performed while on board.

**BUNDLE OF ENERGY (2-PT MERIT)**

You are full of energy. You subsist on five or six hours' sleep a night, you find yourself unable to stay in bed any longer. Your days are full of physical activity, and you can work long into the night without penalty. You cannot have both this Merit and the Endurance Trait (*Hunter Book: Defender*). If you develop the Vigilance edge (*Hunter Book: Judge*) through play, you must cash in this Merit for two freebie points.

**CAT NAPPER (2-PT MERIT)**

Although you need six to eight hours' sleep per night, you don't need it all at once. You catch your Z's as and when you can. As long as your naps total six to eight hours in a 24-hour period — and they usually do unless you're forcibly denied naps — you can function as normal.

**FORGETTABLE (2-PT MERIT)**

It's not that you're ugly. It's just that, well, people's eyes tend to slide over you. You're of average height and build, unremarkable looks and run-of-the-mill dress. People have problems remembering your appearance after they meet you, unless you have talked with them for a long time. Certainly, people won't be able to give a useful description of you if they only see you briefly. You must have an Appearance of 2 or 3 and a Charisma no higher than 3 to take this Merit. If either of those Attributes moves outside its assigned range through play, you lose this Merit. Unlike *Hunter Book: Innocent*'s Everyman Background, this Merit applies solely to your physical appearance. You might have a dreadful credit rating, a police file as thick as the phone book and a sexual history that would make a porn star blush, but people on the street just don't remember you.



RAYBILL 01

**GOOD NIGHT VISION (2-PT MERIT)**

Maybe you spent a lot of time camping. Maybe you're just a fisherman who's used to getting up before dawn. For whatever reason, your night vision is excellent. The difficulty of Perception rolls at night is decreased by two.

**SEXY (2-PT MERIT)**

You are one sexy mutha. You might not necessarily be that good looking, but there's something about the way you move and act that exudes sexuality. As a result, you draw attention from members of the opposite sex, or your own sex, with raw animal magnetism. You may lower the difficulty of any Social roll by two when dealing with someone who is attracted to you. If you actively attempt to direct your charms at a person, you may lower the difficulty by three.

**DAREDEVIL (3-PT MERIT)**

You love taking risks, and the adrenaline rush you get helps you succeed at stunts. Whether, you're leaping from a moving train or taking on a rot in face-to-face combat, you live for danger. When attempting any dangerous action, you can add three dice to your roll and ignore one botch die that results. In general, the action attempted must be at least at difficulty 8 and have the potential to do three health levels of lethal damage or six levels of bashing damage if you fail. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of when this Merit applies, and he may impose a cap of one hair-raising feat per game session.

**HUGE SIZE (3-PT MERIT)**

You're one big individual. You're stand almost seven feet tall and weigh 300 pounds or more, making your physical presence nearly impossible to ignore. Because of your sheer bulk, you gain an extra bruised health level. Your Storyteller may also award you bonuses for attempts to push objects, break down doors or resist being knocked down.

**MENTAL****COMMON SENSE (1-PT MERIT)**

You've been gifted with practical, everyday wisdom that allows you to avoid making stupid, obvious mistakes. Whenever you're about to act in a way that's contrary to common sense, the Storyteller can make a suggestion as to the likely outcome of the action, possibly warning you away from it. Unlike Hunter's Intuition Ability, this Merit doesn't allow you to make good guesses, nor does it offer you any particular insight. It just helps you avoid doing really, really dumb things.

**CONCENTRATION (1-PT MERIT)**

You're rather good at shutting out distractions and focusing on the task at hand. You're unaffected by disturbances — such as screaming kids, loud noises,

hanging upside down or DJs playing really terrible music — when you focus on a particular action.

**GOOD MAP READER (1-PT MERIT)**

You're the Holy Grail of drivers everywhere: someone who can read a map well. Whether you're using an old map and a road atlas to locate a bloodsucker's nest, or you're navigating the New York City subways with a street atlas, you can find your way to where you need to be.

**FAST READER (1-PT MERIT)**

You can read and understand a piece of writing far faster than most people. Although it can make long journeys by train or plane expensive propositions due to the number of books and magazines you go through, it allows you to quickly extract useful information from anything written in your native language.

**GOOD RECOGNITION (1-PT MERIT)**

You are great at remembering the names of people you've encountered, and places you've been. You can call to mind the name of somebody you met briefly at a party three years ago, while you were a bit drunk, as clearly as if you'd met them only yesterday. You can also remember the streets you staggered along on your way home. You're even good at remembering the names of people mentioned in newspaper stories and broadcast reports, and locations glimpsed in still photographs or on TV.

**HEALTHY SKEPTICISM (1-PT MERIT)**

You're good at separating truth from fiction, and someone has to be up pretty damn early to catch you off guard. You rarely take what people say at face value until you're able to check the details yourself. This Merit allows you to reduce the difficulty of any roll to perceive a lie by two. It should be roleplayed as much as possible.

**RELIGIOUS DEVOTION (1-PT TO 3-PT MERIT)**

Your character has strong belief in a particular religious doctrine, the intensity of which is reflected in the Merit rating you choose. This belief gives your hunter strength, comfort and calm in trying times. His devotion grants 1 to 3 additional Willpower points when he's tested, when he must perform a challenging task, or when he needs confidence to succeed at an action. Your character probably prays or asks for guidance or depends upon his own trust in a Supreme Being during these moments. You then have a separate pool of Willpower points that you may draw upon for the remainder of the scene.

These points must be spent in efforts that support or affirm your character's devotion, such as saving another person's life, lifting an obstructing object or controlling his own fear. They cannot be squandered on selfish acts or petty efforts. In essence, if a point is used to perform an act that runs

counter to the teachings or values of your character's faith, perhaps to save himself or to lash out in unjustified anger, he has probably misapplied his devotion. You and the Storyteller must agree what are appropriate circumstances in which you may spend your bonus Willpower points.

When points are squandered or used inappropriately, your character may have strayed from his faith. For major transgressions, he might lose his sense of self and connection to his Creator, temporarily or even permanently. Your character loses this Merit and possibly even additional points of his Willpower rating. Subtle transgressions, such as cursing your Creator for the injustices of the world and doubting your faith as a result, deny your character access to a point or more of his Religious Devotion until he pays emotional penance or reconciles his beliefs.

In general, Religious Devotion can be called upon once per chapter (game session). It may be summoned more frequently under particularly demanding or appropriate circumstances — say to save someone's life or to put your character directly in harm's way — but the Storyteller must consent.

#### TIME SENSE (1-PT MERIT)

You have an almost uncanny sense of time. You can estimate the amount of time that has passed, and the approximate time of day, without using a clock or any other means of measuring time.

#### CODE OF HONOR (2-PT MERIT)

You have a personal code of ethics to which you adhere strictly. This code may be related to your creed or not. There's no reason an Innocent can't have a code of honor that dictates she seek retribution for any direct harm done to her friends. You should work out the details of your code with the Storyteller before play begins. You gain two additional dice to all Willpower rolls when accomplishing a major feat in accordance with your code.

#### DETERMINED (2-PT MERIT)

You're one tenacious bastard, determined to go your own way. It can be really difficult for people to persuade you otherwise. Gain two dice in any resisted roll in which someone tries to persuade you to do something. This Merit also applies to attempts to resist supernatural tricks that have mind-control effects if you do not have Conviction active. You might also have the Stubborn Flaw (see p. 116).

#### EIDEYIC MEMORY (2-PT MERIT)

You have perfect recall. As a result, you can remember things you've seen, heard or read in perfect detail. Entire conversations, documents or pictures can be committed to memory with only minor concentration. Should you attempt such a feat under

stressful conditions — for example, trying to memorize a long list of names while three rots pound at the door — you must make a Perception + Alertness roll, difficulty 6, to summon enough concentration to finish the job (unless you also have the Concentration Merit, which allows you to commit information to memory flawlessly).

#### INTERNET SAVVY (2-PT MERIT)

The Internet is becoming increasingly commonplace, but it is far from universal. Many users never progress beyond the basic email/simple surfing to "sites whose address you know" stage. Characters with this Merit are adept at using the Internet in all its vast, rambling confusion. You can track down and use mailing lists, research obscure weapons and maybe even pick up clues about monsters online.

#### NATURAL LINGUIST (2-PT MERIT)

You have a gift for other languages, reading and speaking them with the fluency of a native. When you learn a language, reflected by increases in your Linguistics Ability, you learn it in more depth and with greater fluency than do most others. You may add three dice to any roll involving writing, reading or speaking a language you know, barring your native tongue (presumably, you use that language almost flawlessly).

#### FAST LEARNER (3-PT MERIT)

You learn the basics of a subject very quickly indeed. You can cram simple information about virtually any subject into your head with speed and ease. You take the normal time to develop a deeper knowledge, of course, but you start getting the hang of things very quickly. The cost to gain a new Ability is one experience point instead of three. Costs for higher levels are normal, however.

#### NATURAL APTITUDE (3-PT MERIT)

You have a particular Ability at which you excel. You're just a natural, or you've studied it so extensively that the Ability comes easily to you. You pay fewer than normal experience points to gain dots in the Ability. Each level is achieved as if it were the one below. The first point of the Ability costs only one experience point to gain if you learn it after play begins. You also gain one extra die on any roll involving that Ability.

#### UNFLAPPABLE (3-PT MERIT)

You are a naturally placid person and take most things in stride. You were almost hit by a car? That was close. Your wife has left you? Ah, well. Although you have emotions as others do, you don't let them affect you to the same degree. You gain two extra dice on any Willpower roll that involves staying calm or not overreacting to mundane experiences — those within your pre-imbuing bounds of

comprehension. This Merit differs from the Steel Nerves Background (see **Hunter Book: Judge**) in that it doesn't make you resistant to supernatural or horrific experiences. It simply helps you to cope with the plausible and unfortunate of everyday life. You might have witnessed dead bodies before, and can deal with seeing them now, but seeing a dead body that's partially devoured is probably beyond your previous experience.

#### **DIRECTION SENSE (4-PT MERIT)**

You have an innate sense of where you are and the distance you've traveled. You can make a good guess of which way is north, even without clues like the position of the sun. You rarely get lost and can estimate the distance between two points pretty well. You may even be able to navigate your way through London's one-way systems. Maybe.

#### **OPTIMISTIC (4-PT MERIT)**

Despite the horrors you've experienced since the imbuing, you have retained a basically positive outlook on life. Even when things go wrong, you face each day with the hope that things will get better. Regain two Willpower when you wake up each morning, rather than the usual one.

### **LEGAL**

#### **SPECIALIST DRIVERS LICENSE (1-PT MERIT)**

Your driving repertoire extends far beyond the SUV or sports car. You're qualified to drive trucks, farm vehicles or some other specialized form of vehicular transportation.

#### **DUAL NATIONALITY (2-PT MERIT)**

Thanks to being born to parents of different countries, you have dual nationality. You may even have two passports. This makes it easy for you to operate in two different places, and even hide out in another country if things get too hot in your normal place of residence.

#### **FIREARMS LICENSE (2-PT MERIT)**

The effect of this Merit depends on the country in which your game is set. In places such as the UK, it indicates that you are allowed to carry weapons. Without this Merit, possession of a firearm is illegal. In countries where you have a right to bear arms, it indicates that you have a license to carry unusual or powerful firearms such as automatic weapons.

### **ECONOMIC**

#### **ALIMONY RECIPIENT (1-PT TO 3-PT MERIT)**

Your marriage has failed, but at least that cheating asshole has to pay you. The level of Merit you buy indicates the number of Resources points you can have (that must be purchased separately) for which you don't have to work. Your rating also

suggests how wealthy your ex was, or how badly he was beaten in court. Chances are you have the Children Flaw, too.

#### **BARGAIN HOUND (1-PT MERIT)**

You have a knack for getting things cheaply. Sometimes you get the goods you need in sales. Sometimes you get them through wholesalers. Sometimes, you just hunt around until you get a bargain. However you do it, the difficulty of any Resources roll you make is decreased by two.

#### **INDEPENDENT INCOME (1-PT TO 5-PT MERIT)**

Through hard work, heredity or phenomenal good fortune, your Resources rating is an independent income for which you don't have to work. The level of Merit you buy indicates how many dots of Resources (which must be purchased separately) you have that do not require you to work.

#### **GOOD CREDIT RATING (2-PT MERIT)**

You've always had a reasonable income, paid your debts on time and built up enough financial security to keep the most cynical banker happy. You have access to a decent amount of credit as a result. You must have 3 or more Resources to purchase this Merit.

#### **WEALTHY PARTNER (2-PT MERIT)**

Your other half is pulling in a fortune, at least by your earning standards, and happy to be the breadwinner. With someone else covering the bills and living expenses, you can get away with a part-time job that allows you time to pursue the hunt.

#### **FLEXIBLE JOB (3-PT MERIT)**

Your job allows you to a flexible schedule or allows you to travel a lot. Or perhaps you're effectively your own boss, with no one monitoring your activities. However you do it, you can earn your Resources rating through a job that doesn't significantly restrict your hunting activities.

#### **PAID MORTGAGE (3-PT MERIT)**

Your house is your own. You've finished paying the bank, so mortgage installments are no longer an issue. Nor is repossession a threat. Even if your hunting costs you your job, you have a roof over your head.

### **FLAWS**

Ericson looked over his charges with the eye of a seasoned professional. He wasn't sure where to begin. He wasn't sure that he wanted to begin, not with this group. He wouldn't feel secure taking them on a walk through the park, never mind going up against whatever the hell Stu Randolph had become.

The young kid, Richie, was still breathing hard after walking up the two flights of stairs to Ericson's place. Ericson eyed the kid's chair, hoping it would be able to support his bulk for the afternoon.

Marianne, on the other hand, looked as if she could be blown away by a breeze. Her arms were as thick as Richie's fingers. Ericson swore he saw track marks on her upper arm, but she adjusted her shirt before he could get a good look.

Tyrone was the only one of the trio who didn't have any obvious physical problems. So, of course, he and Ericson couldn't agree on anything. The one thing they did agree on was that having another screaming match in front of their two colleagues would be a mistake.

Ericson drew a deep breath and prepared to deliver his speech. Well old man, he thought to himself, you survived Nam. You can make it through this.

## SOCIAL

### BAD LIAR (1-PT FLAW)

You have tremendous trouble lying. The spontaneous excuses that you come up with are usually unbelievably elaborate or easily refuted with the bare modicum of research. While telling a prefabricated lie, you stutter, stammer, blush and generally look guilty. Increase the difficulty of any roll that involves verbal deception by two.

### BALDING (1-PT FLAW)

You barely have any hair left on your head, whether it's due to old age or cruel genes. You are relatively easy to pick out of crowds, and you have problems making a good impression on others, especially in romantic situations. Increase the difficulty of any Ability rolls involved in a seduction attempt by one.

### BULLY (1-PT FLAW)

You tend to push people around when you can get away with it. This aggression doesn't necessarily require a physical display; it is often purely social. You chafe under the leadership of more forceful personalities and can be a malcontent when you aren't in charge.

### CHILDREN (1-PT FLAW)

You have children for whom you are a primary emotional, social and economic provider. You take a lot of joy in your kids and pride yourself on being a good parent. Unfortunately, the hunt gets in the way of parenting. If you go more than three days without seeing your kids because of work or activities related to your calling, you feel tremendous guilt. Until you see your kids, you cease to regain a Willpower point after a night of rest.

### CHRONICALLY LATE (1-PT FLAW)

You're always running behind schedule. If you agree to meet someone at a particular time, you must make a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to arrive on time. Failure means you arrive between 15 and 30 minutes late. A botch means you show up an hour late or not at all.

### CHRONIC PESSIMIST (1-PT FLAW)

You think the glass is half-empty, that the water in the glass is contaminated, and that the glass will probably tip over at any second. Others practice pessimism out of habit. For you, it's an art form. Nothing can ever go right, especially plans that others propose. You are the implacable voice of gloom and doom, always ready to point out a potential problem no matter how remote a chance it has of coming to pass. Add two to the difficulty of your Leadership rolls.

### CHRONICALLY SHY (1-PT FLAW)

You become very nervous and ill at ease when dealing with strangers in social situations. You often go out of your way to avoid meeting new people. Increase the difficulty of all Social rolls involving strangers by two.

### CLANNISH FAMILY (1-PT FLAW)

Your family is as loving and supportive as anyone else's. They don't take kindly to strangers, however. Your relatives either disapprove of your friends or they like to keep favors within the family. Your kin don't do anything that directly or indirectly helps anyone apart from their own.

### COLLABORATOR (1-PT FLAW)

Sometime in the recent past, you have allied with one monster or more to take down a more powerful creature or to learn some insight into the ways of night creatures. Or the hunter word-of-mouth circuit reports you doing so, whether legitimately or not. Either way, word has spread through the local hunter community or farther, and many conservative imbued mistrust you.

### CRUDE (1-PT FLAW)

You never learned any manners while growing up. You talk with your mouth full, burp loudly and slurp your soup. When interacting with others in any refined or formal environment, increase the difficulty of all Social rolls by two.

### CULTURAL SNOB (1-PT FLAW)

You have nothing but disdain for popular music, TV and movies. You couldn't name any of the current top-10 songs, and you think knowledge of TV is a sign of poor taste and incorrigible stupidity. Unfortunately, this means you have a hard time relating to people who aren't equally snobbish about such things. When dealing with strangers who don't share your allegedly enlightened views, increase the difficulty of any Social rolls by two.

### DEFENSIVE (1-PT FLAW)

You have problems taking responsibility for your actions. Perhaps you view yourself as a perfectionist, or maybe you're simply too immature to accept the blame for failure. When things go wrong, you look for ways to



blame others and rarely accept blame or criticism for your actions without contention.

#### **ECCENTRIC APPEARANCE (1-PT FLAW)**

You dye your hair pink, wear clothes that are fashionable only among fringe subcultures such as goths or punks, and otherwise appear nothing like the average citizen. When dealing with people not familiar with your particular subculture, increase the difficulty of any Social rolls you attempt by two. Your appearance unnerves mainstream people and makes them wary of you. Furthermore, your appearance is eye-catching, though people tend to focus on your attire rather than your actual physical characteristics, such as eye color.

#### **GAMBLING ADDICT (1-PT FLAW)**

You are addicted to wagering money on games of chance. A sizeable chunk of your income goes toward sustaining your habit, and even when you win you inevitably gamble your winnings away. You're too much of an addict to walk away with a profit over any extended period of time. Increase the difficulty of any Resources rolls you attempt by two.

#### **GOULISH SENSE OF HUMOR (1-PT FLAW)**

You find humor in situations that make most people uncomfortable or even nauseated. Your questionable taste doesn't make you particularly resistant to the horror of gruesome sights. Your defense mecha-

nism is simply to belittle the situation or those involved in an inappropriate way. When confronted with a horribly gory scene or otherwise uncomfortable situation such as people trying to console each other, you tend crack jokes and sling insults. The difficulty of any Social roll you make under such circumstances is increased by two.

#### **ICY DEMEANOR (1-PT FLAW)**

You're uncomfortable relating to people on an emotional level, which is reflected in your mannerisms and speech. You clam up, seek escape or avoid eye contact. Increase the difficulty of any Empathy rolls made toward you by two, as people have trouble identifying with you.

#### **IGNORANT (1-PT FLAW)**

You tend to miss common cultural references that others take for granted, such as knowing that the Statue of Liberty is in New York City. You're not necessarily dumb or uneducated; a cloistered college researcher could just as easily dive so deeply into his field of study that he dismisses anything outside it. You do tend to give people the impression that you're slow or uneducated, however.

#### **IMPRactical DRESSER (1-PT FLAW)**

You tend to dress with an eye toward impressing others rather than personal comfort. Unless you explicitly state that you dress appropriately for physical

activity, you wear high heels, tight jeans or something else that hampers physical activity. Increase the difficulty of Athletics or Dodge rolls by two when you wear such clothes.

#### **INSENSITIVE (I-PT FLAW)**

You have problems understanding how to gauge others' emotional reactions. You can be rather blunt in handling delicate matters, and you often find yourself apologizing without really understanding what you've done to offend someone. Add two to the difficulty of any Empathy rolls you attempt.

#### **INTOLERANT NEIGHBORS (I-PT FLAW)**

Your neighborhood is exceptionally placid and people like it that way. Any odd noises or disturbances coming from your place invariably cause someone to call the police.

#### **MISINFORMED (I-PT FLAW)**

You uphold some odd belief, such as a conspiracy theory or UFO visitation, that flies in the face of accepted science or conventional wisdom. You tend to incorporate this misinformation into your worldview. Whenever you test a Knowledge that in some way relates to your belief, increase the difficulty by two. This penalty kicks in when you roll a failure. It represents your tendency to come up with off-the-wall answers that others see as obviously incorrect.

#### **MISAKEN IDENTITY (I-PT FLAW)**

You bear a striking resemblance to a notorious figure. This person could be someone known to the hunter underground, such as a particularly feared rot or a radical hunter, or you simply look like an infamous media star. While most people can quickly figure out that you aren't who they think you are, hotheads might not think twice before confronting you.

#### **NEEDY FRIENDS (I-PT FLAW)**

Your friends and other non-imbued social contacts have a pattern of falling into bad situations and turning to you for help. You're the bedrock of their lives. Whether what they need is bail money or advice on dealing with a significant other, they look to you. If you have the Allies Background, this effect is magnified even more, at the Storyteller's discretion.

#### **NO INTERNET ACCESS (I-PT FLAW)**

You lack an email address, web access and perhaps so much as a computer. You're unable to keep up with developments on hunter-net, assuming you even know it exists. You must do your research through nondigital outlets such as libraries or by old-fashioned legwork.

#### **NO PHONE (I-PT FLAW)**

You do not have a regular phone number through which you can be contacted. You are very hard to get in touch with on short notice and are difficult to track down. It's hard for you to keep in

touch with your fellow hunters, and you must rely on face-to-face meetings for planning and to arrange subsequent meetings.

#### **NONCONFRONTATIONAL (I-PT FLAW)**

You have a hard time bringing up difficult subjects with others. You're willing to make a lot of sacrifices to avoid interpersonal confrontations. You let people have their way simply to avoid fights, and often you step into arguments and attempt to end them without any thought about the outcome of the discussion, so long as it ends. You have a hard time coping with pushy people and find yourself making lots of compromises that you later wish you hadn't. Add two to the difficulty of any roll that involves debating or arguing with someone who is normally friendly with you.

#### **POOR DENTAL HEALTH (I-PT FLAW)**

Your teeth are very obviously in need of serious work. They jut out at weird angles and some may have fallen out. When interacting with others in superficial social settings such as a nightclub or bar, increase the difficulty of any Social roll by two.

#### **POOR ONLINE Demeanor (I-PT FLAW)**

You have discovered hunter-net or another online community of hunters but managed to antagonize many posters thanks to unnecessary flames or rude behavior. When dealing with a hunter familiar with that mailing list, increase the difficulty of all Social rolls by two.

#### **POOR PERSONAL HYGIENE (I-PT FLAW)**

You often go days without showering, and you brush your teeth only when they start to gain a greenish tinge. You often smell quite bad, and your breath is atrociously offensive. Add two to the difficulty of any die roll that involves interacting face-to-face with others.

#### **POOR TASTE (I-PT FLAW)**

You wallow in bathroom humor, lowbrow jokes and other practices that make more refined people uncomfortable. You've seen movies like *Dumb and Dumber* dozens of times, and don't plan on giving up on them any time soon. Your sense of humor makes you an instant pariah in any reasonably cultured company, and you can't help but let your true colors shine through in even short-term social contacts. Add two to the difficulty of any Social roll that involves people who might dislike your brand of humor.

#### **SHADY PAST (I-PT FLAW)**

You aren't proud of your life before the imbuing, and if word of it ever got out, your fellow hunters might abandon you. Perhaps you ran a kiddie-porn ring, dealt drugs or were involved with organized crime.

**SOCIALLY OBLIVIOUS (1-PT FLAW)**

You have trouble picking up subtle hints from others. You often overstay your welcome at parties, and you tend to blurt out topics that everyone else takes great pains to avoid in conversation. You aren't a socially repellent person, just occasionally tactless. Add two to the difficulty of any Etiquette rolls you attempt.

**SPEECH IMPEDIMENT (1-PT FLAW)**

You stutter, stammer or otherwise have trouble speaking clearly. Increase the difficulty of any roll involving oral communication by two.

**STUBBORN (1-PT FLAW)**

Once your mind is made up, there's no changing it. You cling to your beliefs the way a pit bull does a leg, and you're about as pleasantly comported when others challenge you. You hate to be proved wrong and go to extremes to avoid enduring the shame of it. Increase the difficulties of all Social rolls by two when someone challenges your ways.

**SUPERSTITIOUS (1-PT FLAW)**

You adhere doggedly to a superstition, such as knocking on wood or tossing salt over your shoulder. Although everyone has foibles, you take your behavior to extremes, often tying misfortune to your inability to abide by some superstition, and crediting any success to your adherence to "the rules." Your obsession doesn't lead you to risk your life, nor does it have a pervasive sway over you. You do tend to raise warnings and make superstitious suggestions frequently, though. Add two to the difficulty of any Social roll when dealing with people who know about your superstitious bent and who frown upon it.

**TRUSTING (1-PT FLAW)**

You tend to follow your instincts when dealing with strangers. Sadly, your instincts often tell you that you can trust people. You want to believe the best about everyone you meet and tend to put yourself in situations that could be dangerous, such as accepting a ride home from a recent acquaintance, going home with a person you just met at a bar, or taking a stroll in a poorly patrolled city park after nightfall.

**ABUSIVE PARTNER (2-PT FLAW)**

You're married to or living with someone who routinely abuses you physically. Make a Stamina roll (difficulty 6) every time you spend a night at home. Failure indicates that your character has suffered one health level of bashing damage. A botch means that you suffer two health levels of bashing damage.

**COMPULSIVE LIAR (2-PT FLAW)**

You feel the need to put your personal spin on the truth. You don't necessarily do so out of spite or malice, and you may come to genuinely believe the tall tales

that you tell (especially when you spin them often enough). This Trait is especially troublesome when other hunters rely on you for information about monsters and their habits. You might have to spend a Willpower point to force yourself to be honest, especially if it means publicly revealing a previous lie.

**CONSPICUOUS CONSUMER (2-PT FLAW)**

You tend to blow a lot of money on useless items and overpay for brand-name clothes and other impractical items. You tend to live beyond your means, and you're always short of cash. Add two to the difficulties of Resources rolls.

**DOGGED BY FRINGE MEDIA (2-PT FLAW)**

You have somehow attracted the attention of an amateur reporter, one who operates a fringe web site or publishes a zine that covers the bizarre or paranormal. This crank occasionally follows you to try to discover any dirt on you. Unfortunately, and in true modern journalism style, he tends to catch you in bizarre circumstances that he simply can't understand. Of course, he tries to interpret them anyway.

**FOREIGNER (2-PT FLAW)**

You are not native to the area in which you currently live — and hunt. Although you may understand the language and the general customs, you have trouble with many of the details. You have a distinguishing accent (which makes you easy to identify), and the difficulty of any Streetwise or Etiquette checks you attempt are increased by two.

**HONEST TO A FAULT (2-PT FLAW)**

You always try to tell the truth, no matter what the situation. You won't stretch it, bend it or manipulate it to take advantage of others, unless human lives are in jeopardy. If you do attempt to lie to someone, the difficulty of any roll involved is increased by two.

**INFAMY (2-PT FLAW)**

People in your community tend to recognize you for all the wrong reasons. Maybe you were involved in a local scandal involving a politician, or perhaps you were charged but not convicted in a sensational case. No matter what the cause, you tend to attract a lot of unwanted attention wherever you go. People look down on you, though they don't necessarily hinder or harass you. Add two to the difficulty of any Social rolls that involve people who know your past.

**LUSTFUL (2-PT FLAW)**

You can't resist the erotic advances of the appropriate gender(s). You are easily seduced and often exhibit very poor judgment when dealing with sexually attractive people. The difficulty of any attempts to seduce you is reduced by two.

**MONSTROUS CONNECTIONS (2-PT FLAW)**

You have to deal with a monster as part of your job or even your family life. Perhaps it's your boss or a key

family figure. The monster is not necessarily hostile toward you — it might not even know you're a hunter — but it's in a position to cause you a lot of trouble should it choose to.

#### **NOSY NEIGHBORS (2-PT FLAW)**

Your neighborhood is rife with gossips and busybodies. Your neighbors are always dropping by for unannounced visits, and they take an active interest in your comings and goings. You might want to wash up before heading home if you've just killed a rot and are covered with guts.

#### **POOR JUDGE OF CHARACTER (2-PT FLAW)**

You're the type of person who always ends up hanging out with the wrong crowd. Maybe you just like to date dangerous men or you're a sucker for a woman in trouble (or vice versa). Whatever the reason, you have a very hard time figuring out whom to trust. Increase the difficulty of all Awareness and Intuition rolls you attempt in social circumstances by two. Also, your friends and acquaintances tend to be sponges and other lowlives.

#### **STALKED (2-PT FLAW)**

Someone has an unhealthy obsession with you. Despite repeated calls to the police and several restraining orders, this person continues to follow and occasionally harass you. Your Storyteller should create game stats for the stalker. Any time you head out on the hunt, the Storyteller can make a Perception test on your behalf, difficulty 6. If it fails or botches, your stalker has managed to tail you throughout the night and may put in an appearance.

#### **TECHNOFOBE (2-PT FLAW)**

You are severely intimidated by computers and other technology. You never use an ATM if a teller is available, and you get nervous at the sight of a keyboard. You must make an Intelligence roll, difficulty 6, to perform even simple tasks on a computer, ATM or similar device. Increase the difficulty of any Computer or Technology roll by two.

#### **MONEYGRUBBING (3-PT FLAW)**

You exist to make money. Family, friends and other concerns are trivial when compared to the almighty dollar. If someone offers you a bribe, you must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, to resist. If the bribe involves something that as far as you know won't directly result in any injuries or lasting damage, increase the difficulty to 8. You also tend to target monsters that have a lot of material wealth. Sometimes, the best part of the hunt is looting the bodies of fallen monsters... or allies.

#### **WAVERING FAITH (3-PT FLAW)**

You were once a strong adherent of a religion, but your faith has faded (or fades) in the face of the enemy.

If a divine being exists, how could He let such creatures prey on humanity? Ghosts are concrete evidence that the afterlife is flawed. Your confidence is severely shaken. Add two to the difficulty of all Willpower tests.

#### **CRIMINAL ENTANGLEMENTS (4-PT FLAW)**

You owe a lot of money or a big favor to someone on the wrong side of the law, and you have refused or been unable to pay. Although hitmen aren't being sent after you quite yet, the threat hangs over you constantly. The exact nature of the debt and the individual(s) behind it are left to the Storyteller, but they should suit your character concept.

#### **UNLUCKY (4-PT FLAW)**

You've dealt with bad breaks all your life. From that true love who had to move across the country to the struggling Internet company you quit two months before its billion-dollar IPO, you seem always to make the wrong moves at the wrong time. Once per game session, the Storyteller may increase the difficulty of a critical roll you make by two. If you fail the roll, it's due to some random, hard-luck factor. Your bad luck seems to crop up at the most inconvenient times. You may not take this Flaw and the Fool's Luck edge. Acquiring that edge frees up points spent on Unlucky for other Flaws. Nor can you have the Lucky Merit.

#### **PACIFIST (5-PT FLAW)**

You utterly refuse to use violence against anything, even if your life or the lives of others are in immediate danger. Furthermore, you work hard to prevent others from using violence, though you do not recklessly endanger yourself or expect others to do so. You never carry weapons and refuse to procure them. A Willpower roll, difficulty 6, may be required to resist the temptation to engage in violence when a gross offense is committed before or against you, such as a loved one being harmed. If you defy your nature and succumb to violence at some point, you cannot regain Willpower each morning until you come to terms with your lapse or you change life philosophies altogether.

#### **PHYSICAL**

##### **ALLERGIES (1-PT FLAW)**

You're allergic to a rather common substance, such as cat fur, that causes sneezing, coughing, watery eyes and other distracting symptoms. The difficulty of all actions increases by one when you are exposed to whatever triggers your allergy.

##### **ARTHROITIC (1-PT FLAW)**

Your joints, especially your hands, are stiff and often swollen. When you attempt anything that requires a fine and careful touch such as sewing or repairing a watch, increase the difficulty of your roll by one.

**COLOR BLIND (1-PT FLAW)**

You have trouble distinguishing between hues. You must make a Perception roll, difficulty 6, to accurately determine the color of an object.

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC (1-PT OR 2-PT FLAW)**

You have a physical feature that makes you very easy to pick out in crowds, such as elaborate tattoos, a scar or an obvious birthmark. This Flaw is worth one point if the characteristic is hidden easily under clothes, two points if it is not.

**HEAVY SLEEPER (1-PT FLAW)**

You tend to sleep right through most disturbances, from the loud stereo playing next door to the rot that just burst into your home. You must make a successful Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to wake up quickly. Failure means you spend the equivalent of a combat turn waking up. A botch means you sleep right through the disturbance, pending the Storyteller's judgment on the situation.

**LAZY (1-PT FLAW)**

You have trouble motivating yourself to do anything. You'd rather sit around the house watching TV and thinking of doing something with your life than actually getting up and doing it. You tend to complain loudly when there's work to do, and you prefer to let things slide until the last possible moment. You must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to take care of any routine tasks not directly related to the hunt, such as repairing your car after that skinchanger tore off the hood.

**LOW ALCOHOL TOLERANCE (1-PT FLAW)**

Alcohol goes straight to your head. While this can be an advantage when you try to enjoy a night out on the cheap, it can be deadly on the hunt. Double any penalties you suffer for consuming alcohol.

**MOTION SICKNESS (1-PT FLAW)**

You become queasy and nauseous on board boats, when traveling long distances by car or on amusement-park rides. Increase the difficulty of all actions you take by two when dealing with these conditions.

**NO SENSE OF SMELL (1-PT FLAW)**

You completely lack a sense of smell. You may have simply been born without it, or perhaps you lost it due to some freak accident. You can't smell anything, no matter how strong the odor might be. Food tastes somewhat bland to you. On the good side, you aren't bothered by the stench of sewers, rotting flesh or other nastiness.

**NO SENSE OF TASTE (1-PT FLAW)**

Your taste buds simply do not function. You cannot appreciate a fine meal, and you have trouble gauging the difference between good and bad food and drink.

**NONSWIMMER (1-PT FLAW)**

You never learned to swim, and you have no natural talent for it. If you ever find yourself in a position where you must try to swim, you can manage a pitiable doggie paddle. Increase the difficulty of any Athletics rolls involving swimming by two.

**POOR EYESIGHT (1-PT OR 3-PT FLAW)**

You are either severely nearsighted or farsighted. Increase the difficulty of any rolls that involve visual acuity by two. The one-point version is correctable with glasses or contact lenses. The three-point version is not.

**POOR HEARING (1-PT OR 3-PT FLAW)**

Your hearing is exceptionally bad. Increase the difficulty of any roll involving auditory acuity by two. This Flaw is worth one point if it is correctable with a hearing aid or similar device, three points if it is not.

**SICKLY (1-PT FLAW)**

You are constantly coughing and wheezing, and you have trouble shaking colds. You suffered almost every childhood illness imaginable, and you've only become worse as an adult. When making checks to avoid catching a disease or developing an infection, increase the difficulty of the roll by two.

**VICE (1-PT TO 3-PT FLAW)**

You're addicted to some sort of controlled substance. The one-point version of this Flaw represents an addiction that is legal and easy to satisfy, such as cigarettes. The two-point version represents a legal or mildly illegal substance that inhibits your ability to hunt effectively, such as alcohol or marijuana. The three-point version represents an addiction to a highly illegal or highly dangerous "hard" drug such as heroin. You're always under the effects of your chosen vice (you have the Addiction derangement; see *Hunter Book: Redeemer*, p. 68.)

**YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE (1-PT FLAW)**

You look like you're still in high school. You always get carded at bars and often have to produce identification even to buy cigarettes. In order to gain entry to clubs, concerts or bars, or to purchase alcohol, you need to present a valid-looking ID.

**DISFIGURED (2-PT FLAW)**

Your face is misshapen or maimed. Increase the difficulty of any rolls involving social situations by two. You cannot have an Appearance rating above 1.

**INSOMNIAC (2-PT FLAW)**

For whatever reason, you have tremendous trouble getting more than a few hours of sleep. You are often groggy and slow as a result. Increase the difficulty of any Alertness, Awareness or Intuition rolls by two. You can't have this Flaw and either the Vigilance edge or the Endurance Ability. Acquiring

either of these Traits frees up the points spent on Insomniac for other Flaws.

#### **LOW PAIN TOLERANCE (2-PT FLAW)**

You have a very low capacity for pain. You turn into a whimpering, blubbering ball of misery at the first sign of it. Although you soak damage normally, you suffer an additional -1 die-pool penalty whenever you are injured.

#### **OBESIVE (2-PT FLAW)**

You are seriously overweight and large enough that you have trouble using the seats in most theaters. Add two to the difficulty of any Dodge or Athletics rolls that you make. You move at half the normal rate.

#### **OLD INJURY (2-PT FLAW)**

You hurt yourself pretty badly back in your younger days and now pay the price with chronic pain and tenderness. Increase the difficulty of any Athletics roll by two.

#### **Poor Night Vision (2-PT FLAW)**

Your eyesight is poor in low-light conditions. Increase the difficulty of any action attempted in dim light, such as what a flashlight might provide or under starlight alone, by two. The Discern edge eliminates Poor Night Vision when the edge is active, although other perception-based powers such as Witness and Illuminate offer no relief from this Flaw. You must

compensate for your bad night vision with bright light or close proximity to a subject for Witness or Illuminate to function properly.

#### **SHORT (2-PT FLAW)**

You are less than five feet tall, making it difficult for you to reach and use many objects designed for average adult use. Your movement rate is also half that of average-sized people.

#### **CRIPPLED LIMB (3-PT FLAW)**

You are either missing a limb or have injured it so badly that it is unusable. If one of your arms is crippled, increase the difficulty of rolls for actions that normally require two hands, such as firing a rifle or bow, by two. If one of your legs is crippled, without some sort of cane, walker or wheelchair you can move at only one-quarter normal speed. With the appropriate aid, you may move at up to half normal speed.

#### **ELDERLY (3-PT FLAW)**

You're too old for this shit, but you're too damn ornery to step aside and let others do the fighting. Although you're just as strong and quick as some of the younger hunters, you don't have the endurance or resiliency of youth anymore. You make soak rolls against a 7 difficulty instead of the normal 6. In addition, increase the dice-pool penalty for each of your levels of injury by one.



**SHAKY HANDS (3-PT FLAW)**

You have a lot of trouble keeping yourself composed under pressure. In any extremely stressful situation such as combat, your hands shake so badly that you have trouble completing any tasks that require a delicate touch and intense concentration. Examples include picking a lock, loading bullets into a revolver or typing at a computer. Increase the difficulty of any rolls for such demanding activities by two.

**MISSING EYE (3-PT FLAW)**

You're missing one of your eyes. Increase the difficulty of any Perception rolls involving eyesight by two. The difficulties of all die rolls involving depth perception (such as ranged-weapons attacks) are also increased by two. Amazingly, the Discern edge allows you perfect sight as if through both eyes.

**CHILD (4-PT FLAW)**

You are prepubescent. You're much smaller than the average adult and move at half the rate of adults. Also, because you are not fully developed physically, you may not start play with more than three dots in any Physical Attribute. Similarly, you do not have the experience of an adult and cannot start play with more than three dots in any Knowledge Ability.

**CHRONIC ILLNESS (4-PT FLAW)**

You suffer from a debilitating illness such as chronic fatigue syndrome or even cancer. You frequently feel weak, and you are easily injured. Add two to the difficulty of any Athletics or soak rolls.

**DEAFNESS (4-PT FLAW)**

You cannot hear. You automatically fail any test that requires hearing, and the difficulty of appropriate Alertness rolls is increased by three.

**BLIND (6-PT FLAW)**

You can't see. Increase the difficulty of any rolls involving hand-eye coordination by three. The Discern edge allows you to see even though your eyes do not function. Other Perception-based edges such as Illuminate and Witness may operate for you as well by intensifying other senses such as smell. The Storyteller may even rule that second sight is still useful to you via means other than seeing, if you know how to interpret the sensory impressions you receive.

**MENTAL****GULLIBLE (1-PT FLAW)**

You have a lot of trouble separating truth from fiction. You're not stupid, you just tend to believe what people tell you rather than to take things with a grain of salt. Increase by two the difficulty of any roll to detect lies.

**MEDICATED (1-PT OR 5-PT FLAW)**

You require daily medication to stay in good health. As a one-point flaw, your medication is im-

portant for your long-term health but has little effect on your day-to-day well-being, as with prescription drugs that keep your cholesterol down. The five-point version represents insulin shots or something else that is necessary to keep you alive. If you should miss a day's worth of medicine, you automatically suffer a bashing or lethal level of damage for every 12 hours that pass without your medicine, as determined by the Storyteller. This damage is healed at a rate of one level per 12 hours that pass once you resume your regular medication schedule.

**NIGHTMARES (1-PT FLAW)**

Your sleep is plagued by visions of the horrors that walk the earth. You must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, to sleep through the night without being tormented. The day after, add two to the difficulty of the first Ability or Attribute roll you make to deal with monsters. You can have the Vigilance edge or Endurance Ability and this Flaw; the little sleep you get with either is simply haunted by really bad dreams. The Storyteller may rule that any roll made to apply Conviction reactively (see *Hunter*, p. 133) while you sleep is at a +1 difficulty.

**NO SENSE OF DIRECTION (1-PT FLAW)**

You get lost all the time. Maps, compasses and detailed directions do little to help. You have a lot of trouble figuring out where you are in relation to landmarks that aren't immediately obvious, and maps are largely incomprehensible to you. Increase by two the difficulty of any roll that involves following convoluted directions, backtracking a route or navigating a confusing set of city streets.

**POOR SENSE OF TIME (1-PT FLAW)**

You have no intuition for the flow of time. You can't even begin to guess the current time without looking at a clock, and you always overestimate or underestimate the amount of time that has passed since a specified event (or that remains before one).

**SHORT TEMPER (1-PT FLAW)**

You are easily driven to distraction by what would otherwise be minor failures and other frustrations. If you fail to gain any successes on any single roll during an extended action, increase the difficulty of all subsequent rolls by one, cumulatively.

**TERRIBLE WITH NAMES (1-PT FLAW)**

Try as you might, you almost always forget people's names, especially when meeting large groups for the first time. You may not write down the names of any people you meet during the game unless your character (as opposed to you, the player) has paper and a writing utensil handy. You also have problems remembering whether you've been someplace before, and with recognizing faces. Make an Intelligence roll, difficulty 6, to recall such information.

**ABSENT-MINDED (2-PT FLAW)**

Details and important facts slip your mind constantly. Once per game session, when you attempt to use an item that you normally carry with you, the Storyteller may require you to make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to determine whether you remembered to bring it or, if so, whether you can remember where it is. The item turns up again after an hour or so of searching.

**ATTENTION-DEFICIT DISORDER (2-PT FLAW)**

You have a hard time sitting still and paying attention to anything for more than a few minutes. If you must sit still and quiet for more than 10 minutes, such as when keeping watch over a monster or standing guard, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. On a failure, you lose interest in your task and are distracted from it.

**DYSLEXIC (2-PT FLAW)**

Printed information of any sort, from written text to maps, is nearly indecipherable to you. Although you are not necessarily illiterate, you struggle to read the simplest sentences. In order to interpret a map or read anything, you must make a successful Intelligence roll, difficulty 8. On a botch, you interpret the message to have almost its opposite meaning.

**EATING DISORDER (2-PT FLAW)**

You have an unhealthy obsession with your appearance and have chosen to starve yourself in order to lose weight. Increase the difficulty of any Stamina-related rolls by two.

**LANGUAGE BARRIER (2-PT OR 3-PT FLAW)**

You cannot speak the language or dialect in your area of operations. In order to communicate with the locals, you must find a translator or rely on a language handbook to attempt rough translations. Taking the two-point version means you can read the language but have trouble using it in conversation. The three-point version means that you can neither speak nor read it.

**OVERCONFIDENT (2-PT FLAW)**

You either overestimate your own skill or underestimate your opponents'. Once per game session, the Storyteller may secretly increase by two the difficulty of a non-combat action that you take. This increase represents your tendency to plunge headlong into activities that are beyond your capabilities.

**PHOBIA (2-PT FLAW)**

You have a deep-seated aversion to something such as heights, spiders or even the dark. You suffer from one aspect of the Phobias derangement (see Hunter Book: Defender, p. 74).

**FAINTE OF HEART (3-PT FLAW)**

The sight of gore and blood shocks you to the core. If you witness a gruesome scene, you must make a

Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to avoid debilitating nausea for five to 10 minutes. The difficulty of all actions increases by one when you're in this state. You cannot have this Flaw and the Steel Nerves Background. If you ever acquire that Trait, this Flaw's three points must be assigned to other disabilities.

**INCOMPETENT (3-PT FLAW)**

You are spectacularly bad at something. Unfortunately, you're the only person around who doesn't understand this fact. Pick a single Ability. You believe you have the proficiency equal to three dots in that Trait, when in reality you almost always ruin any effort involving it. Whenever you try to use the Ability, treat the outcome as if you rolled a botch.

**LOW SELF-ESTEEM (3-PT FLAW)**

You have trouble accepting your own value and worth. You tend to highlight your failures and overlook your triumphs. Whenever you have the opportunity to gain Willpower from accomplishing goals (not from resting), make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. If you fail the roll, you do not gain the bonus. If you botch, you lose a temporary point of Willpower.

**SLOW LEARNER (3-PT FLAW)**

You always lagged behind in school, and even the most patient people find it frustrating to teach you the simplest concepts. You aren't dumb. It just takes you longer than most to wrap your brain around things. For the purposes of figuring out how many experience points it costs to raise an Ability, add one to your current rating. Acquiring a new Ability costs four experience points, not the usual three.

**WEAK-WILLED (3-PT FLAW)**

Try as you might, it's challenging for you to summon inner reserves of courage or toughness. Whereas others shoulder extra burdens in the name of the hunt, you simply find the going harder and harder. You're not a coward. You just don't have the fortitude necessary to make truly heroic efforts. Add two to the difficulty of all Willpower rolls. As long as you have this Flaw, your Willpower rating may never rise above 8.

**AMNESIA (4-PT FLAW)**

Life before your imbuing is a vague blur. You remember nothing of the existence you led before you were chosen — that doesn't mean your old life has forgotten you, though. Your Storyteller creates the details of your old life and the circumstances surrounding your amnesia.

**DEPRESSION (4-PT FLAW)**

You're mired in a pit of bleak, mind-numbing sorrow. Convinced that your eternally dark mood is completely natural — or deserved — you refuse to seek professional help. You do not regain a point of Willpower per day as most characters do. Instead, you may

gain Willpower only through actions, and even those must ardently reaffirm your goals, such as tracking down and destroying the first monster that you ever witnessed — a creature that did you grievous harm. If you ever acquire the Manic-Depression derangement, the points spent on this Flaw are freed up and must be spent on new Flaws.

#### **ILLITERATE (4-PT FLAW)**

You never learned to read or write your native language. You can understand most traffic signs and warning labels that rely on pictographs, but written instructions and warnings are completely beyond your comprehension. This Flaw does not interfere with your understanding of hunter code.

#### **LEGAL**

#### **POLITICAL EXTREMIST (1-PT FLAW)**

You have connections to a political organization that most people view with suspicion or fear, such as the Nation of Islam or the Ku Klux Klan. You are an active member of the group and local law enforcement has an open dossier on you. Although you do not necessarily have a criminal record or engage in illegal activity, the local police view you as a troublemaker and suspicious character. At any given time, you might be the target of undercover observation prompted by the activities of your organization.

#### **REVOKED DRIVER'S LICENSE (1-PT FLAW)**

You have lost your driver's license due to a poor driving record. If you are pulled over for any reason or are otherwise caught driving, you will be arrested immediately and your car will be impounded.

#### **SUNDAY DRIVER (1-PT FLAW)**

Whenever you go out with friends, no one wants you to drive. You pay almost obsessive attention to traffic regulations and make a conscious effort to drive below the speed limit. Alternatively, you have no patience for traffic, right of way or signs, or you simply fail to pay attention to the road. The difficulty of any Drive rolls you make during a chase or other high-speed situation is increased by two.

#### **CRIMINAL RECORD (2-PT FLAW)**

Having been convicted for several misdemeanors or perhaps for a minor felony, you have a bit of a shady past. You are unable to buy firearms legally, and you receive exceptionally poor treatment from law-enforcement officials who know your record.

#### **PROBATION (2-PT FLAW)**

You are currently on probation for some minor offense. You have to meet with a case officer on a regular basis and are subject to random drug tests and searches of your home and person. You must also commit — or seem to commit — yourself to becoming a good citizen: maintaining a job, keeping current with

debt and other aspects of respectable life that the hunt makes challenging.

#### **ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT (3-PT FLAW)**

You lack proper lawful permission to be in the country in which you currently live. You do not have a legitimate ID and are likely to be deported to your nation of origin if you are placed under arrest. You cannot hold a job unless it pays under the table.

#### **WANTED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT (3-PT FLAW)**

You are the prime suspect in a felony crime. The police actively look for you, and you cannot move openly about your usual hangouts. If you encounter cops who know that you're wanted, they'll call in back-up and try to bring you in.

#### **ECONOMIC**

#### **AUDIT (1-PT FLAW)**

You currently undergo an audit by the national tax authority. You cannot purchase illegal goods totalling more than \$500 without attracting the attention of the officers assigned to your case. Any money you wish to use for illegal purposes must be laundered first. Increase the difficulty of all Resources rolls by two.

#### **DEMANDING CAREER (2-PT FLAW)**

Your current job requires long hours and frequent travel, making it challenging for you to both work and pursue the hunt. You must always carry a pager and keep in touch with the office, and you can be called back to work at almost any time. If you should quit your job to free up time for the calling, reduce your Resources by at least one point.

#### **PRIMARY BREADWINNER (2-PT FLAW)**

You are the primary income earner in your family. You pay the bills, from the heat and electricity to the weekly groceries. You have to maintain a steady paying job, despite the demands of the hunt. At least two points of your Resources score must be dedicated to supporting your family. If your rating drops below that level, your family begins to suffer. The difficulty of all Willpower rolls you attempt is increased by two thereafter, because of the deep shame and embarrassment you feel for not providing for your loved ones.

#### **UNINSURED (2-PT FLAW)**

You either cannot afford insurance or have simply chosen to go without it. You must pay for all medical expenses and any damage incurred from accidents out of pocket.

#### **ALIMONY PAYMENTS (3-PT FLAW)**

You are financially responsible for your ex-spouse and perhaps children. You must hold down a steady job and meet monthly payments or risk having your assets frozen and your possessions seized. You can never have more than 3 Resources because of the economic hardship of keeping up with payments.

**HOMELESS (4-PT FLAW)**

You live on the streets. You can never have any dots in Resources, and you have no secure place to rest when you're not hunting. You cannot heal any lethal damage naturally while living on the street, and you must either carry all of your property with you at all times or risk hiding it and hope no one finds it.

**BACKGROUNDS MAKE THE HUNTER**

Sarin sat in the car and looked out the window at the old neighborhood.

It hadn't changed all that much. The Rous' house looked different, maybe with a new coat of paint. But to Sarin, his old stomping grounds seemed like another world. It reminded him of his grandfather's sepia-toned photographs — a bygone era frozen in browns and grays. He reached down, fumbled with the ignition, decided to leave it off and sat in the near darkness as night fell around his parents' house. He didn't want to leave.

Sarin could see his mother cleaning up after supper, washing dishes the old-fashioned way. His father, out of sight, was sitting in his lazy-boy smoking a cigar. Sarin could smell the thick aroma of it. Both were oblivious to the horrors that now, probably somewhere nearby, awoke. Not for the first time, Sarin wished he'd never heard the call.

He had hesitated about coming home. He couldn't stand lying to his parents, especially his dad. In the past months he'd all but abandoned his former life, faced things no sane person should even know about, and here he was afraid to visit his parents. Sarin smiled to himself as he climbed out of the car.

They welcomed him as if nothing had happened. It almost didn't matter anymore that Sarin had dropped out of medical school and wasted every nickel his father, a plumber, had saved to ensure his son didn't have to fix toilets for a living. No questions were asked. No answers were expected. It was a quiet family gathering, complete with his mom's famous blueberry pie and his father's dreams of the Blackhawks winning the Stanley Cup (or just getting there).

It was a pleasant evening. Sarin didn't want it to end, but it had to. He said goodbye to his mother, hugged her and walked out onto the porch. Sarin's father was waiting there.

"So you're off?"

"Yeah, for now." Sarin answered, looking anywhere but into his father's eyes.

"Here. Take this...." Sarin's father handed him a thick envelope. Sarin didn't have to look. He knew what was in it.

"I can't, Dad, you've done enough already."

"Just take it. But for your mom's sake, make sure you visit more often. She misses you. We both do." With that, his father stepped inside and locked the door behind him.

In the car, Sarin looked at his old home one last time. He saw the light in the kitchen go off, the one in the bedroom come on. He smiled as he turned the ignition and drove away.

He was glad he'd come home.

**ROOTS**

Nestled inconspicuously on your character sheet next to "Edges" and "Virtues," Backgrounds are more than simple "advantages." They alone can tell the story of who your character was before becoming a hunter. More importantly, they are your character's link to her past — to her life before the imbuing.

A character's Nature and Demeanor are a blueprint of her personality. Her creed and Virtues describe her as one of the imbued, but Backgrounds represent her past, who she was, where she came from and who those things made her. Backgrounds are your character's roots. Before she was imbued, she was a regular person. She had family, friends, a job — the ordinary stuff that tends to get ignored in roleplaying games, but which serves a prominent role in Hunter.

Backgrounds determine what kind of life your character lived before hearing the Messengers' call. Two Martyrs might have the same edges and Virtues, but their Backgrounds can be worlds apart. One might have been raised in the lap of luxury (Resources, Influence), whereas the other might be a street kid (Contacts, Allies). This is the true potential of Backgrounds. A character without these Traits is a caricature, yet it takes more than dots to make her three-dimensional. Each Background must be integrated into the overall concept of your character. If not, the Traits lose their relevance and purpose.

It's best to think of Backgrounds as roleplaying "stats" rather than as dots on a character sheet. Unlike points in Conviction or Skills that quantify what your character can do, each Background represents a "slice" of your character's past. All Backgrounds give characters certain benefits, such as friends in high places or a stash of automatic weapons. These advantages are by-products, however, not the be-all and end-all of Backgrounds. Each dot is really a snapshot of your hunter's life. Together, Backgrounds paint a picture of who your character really is, who she knows, what she's done and what she might do next.

**TIES THAT BIND**

Collectively, Backgrounds remind your character that once, not that long ago, she was a normal person. They're best thought of as story and plot devices rather than as weapons or favors to exploit.

Your character doesn't gain or lose Backgrounds by acquiring or spending experience points or rolling dice. Backgrounds are gained and lost through roleplaying, pure and simple.

You have to keep in mind that while your character's Backgrounds are penciled in on your character sheet, that doesn't mean they're guaranteed or that you can take them for granted. Most of the Traits demand some sort of "upkeep" to be retained — an ally won't always come to the rescue unless your character bothers to have a drink with him sometimes, or unless your character does the occasional favor in return. Backgrounds require roleplaying. They force your character to interact with the people from her mundane life, and in doing so help define her roots and motivation for continuing the hunt. Your character's friends and loved ones are precisely the people she protects by going out night after night, and this article explores how to make Backgrounds an integral aspect of your character and ongoing chronicle.

## DEVELOPING BACKGROUNDS

There are no hard-and-fast rules or mechanics for losing, acquiring or developing Backgrounds once play begins. This lack is not a design flaw, but rather a quite conscious decision. It illustrates the fact that Backgrounds are pivotal to creating and roleplaying a real, developing character, not a static action-movie clone.

Evolving Backgrounds is best handled through roleplaying. Savvy Storytellers may base changes in your character's Backgrounds on your character's actions and on story events. Befriending a reporter might gain your character a dot in Allies. Meanwhile, finding out that her boss is one of the walking dead might result in a loss of a job and a dot (or more) of Resources. But most changes in Backgrounds require a personal effort or conscious choice on the part of your character. Her behavior is key to developing her Backgrounds, and that's why roleplaying them is of paramount importance.

Increasing a Background requires some sort of investment on your character's part — helping a friend or loved one, fulfilling a personal goal. Gaining Backgrounds is a small victory in life and on the mission. Conversely, *losing* Backgrounds represents a setback for your character — personal failure, failing a loved one, the inability to help those in need. How a character deals with these accomplishments and setbacks is what determines how her Background ratings change.

Such personal victories or losses paint most — but not all — of the picture, however. The remainder involves the accomplishments and setbacks that a character experiences during the course of a story —

the events that benefit or afflict her and that are not usually subject to her control. The murder of one of her contacts or allies is a detriment to her Traits rating, but not necessarily one she can influence.

Think of Backgrounds and their ratings as a measure of your character's interaction with the world. They quantify what she accomplishes and how she is set back. Whether your character stands to gain or lose a Background point, the event should be the focus of at least a scene in a story. Even better, such changes can be handled as solo game sessions between you and Storyteller, similar to a prelude. The game should place your character in a situation in which she must make a decision or take direct action in regard to the Trait in question. The outcome determines whether she gains or loses dots, or retains her former score.

### BY THE BOOK

Technically speaking, Backgrounds fall into a nebulous zone as no firm mechanic governs their development. This freedom is both a blessing and a curse. It's a blessing because players can't increase Backgrounds by spending experience points, thereby placing the focus on roleplaying and personality development. The downside is, Background changes are a judgment call and have the potential to upset players or unbalance the game if not considered carefully.

Adjudicating changes to Backgrounds falls squarely on the shoulders of the Storyteller, but that doesn't mean you have no say. As a player, you can always petition your Storyteller whenever you feel an event or situation warrants an increase or decrease in a score. Although suggesting a loss might seem counterproductive as a player — say, you believe that being convicted of a crime should reduce your character's Fame — your Storyteller may reward such honesty elsewhere for being true to your hunter's identity. Such rewards could include Willpower or experience points. Unless events are intense, a character should not gain or lose more than one Background point of any kind in a single game session.

### ROLEPLAYING BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds are more than secondary mechanics called into play whenever your hunter wants to do something not within her immediate power — get information or sneak into a crime scene, for example. They represent the baggage that we all carry through life. Your character is no different. It's easy for players to ignore Backgrounds or to resort to them as "get out of jail free" cards to be used when needed. While there's nothing inherently wrong with that, it minimizes the Traits' storytelling potential. **Hunter** is about ordinary people thrust into

**BY THE NUMBERS**

The ways in which roleplaying and story events can influence Background ratings are discussed under each Trait. If you don't want to rely on such ephemeral influence over your ratings, you can turn to the following more mechanical systems. These are *optional* systems for developing Backgrounds between stories, and are subject to the Storyteller's approval.

**Downtime**

Not every moment of your character's life is roleplayed or needs to be the focus of a story. Between each story, your hunter presumably goes back to her normal existence, or what's left of it that she can hold together. This is called downtime. One benefit of downtime is that it allows you the opportunity to increase your character's Backgrounds without having to wait for a suitable in-game event to signal the change. Although the Storyteller must still approve any changes, downtime gives you some direct control over developing your character's Background Traits.

During downtime, you can trade-in permanent Willpower points for Background points. This exchange represents your character's commitment and devotion to reconciling the hunt with her mundane life—perhaps by getting home from patrol in time to get the kids off to school, or disposing of monstrous evidence and getting an oil change. Although the two lifestyles are not mutually exclusive, they cannot usually be reconciled without sacrifice, and the expenditure of your Willpower rating serves as a reminder of this challenge.

To increase an existing Background or acquire a new one you must spend a number of permanent Willpower points equal to the new rating of the Background. Increasing Allies from 2 to 3 requires three Willpower points, whereas gaining the first dot in Contacts costs only one Willpower point.

Trading permanent Willpower can be done all at one time or over a number of stories until you have accumulated the required amount. The latter approach allows you to set aside Willpower points in a pool when you think your character can sacrifice them, without diminishing your Willpower rating severely in one fell swoop for the sake of a new Background point. Pooled Willpower points are deducted from your character's Willpower rating and are usable only to increase a Background thereafter. They cannot be restored to your Willpower rating or spent as regular Willpower points any longer.

Increasing Backgrounds through downtime requires a suitable explanation for the rating change, such as getting a job (Resources), helping a friend paint his house (Allies) or taking the sergeant's exam (Influence). Only one Background can be increased at a time between stories.

**Background Pool**

Your character always has a pool of five Background points. That's how many you get to spend at character creation. No matter what happens during play, you can never drop below that starting pool of five points for the purposes of this system. If your character has only five Background points and loses a dot in a Trait, the point is returned to the pool and you can use it to augment an existing Background or develop a new one. Of course, such change can occur only through roleplaying (see the individual Background descriptions for examples) or during downtime (with this system, there is no need to spend Willpower points).

Of course, if you have more than five total points in Backgrounds and you lose some of those points, they're lost forever. If your character has six dots in Backgrounds and loses two, only one point is returned to your Background pool.

**Example:** If and when Spaulding's mentor, Old Zebulon, dies Spaulding's player could channel the dots allocated to Mentor to any other Background such as Patron—as long as Spaulding did not have more than five dots in Backgrounds at the time. If he did, the excess dots would be lost.

extraordinary situations, and Backgrounds help reinforce that "everyday person" theme.

Behind each dot in a Background is usually a person—one of the very people your hunter tries to save from the abominations that stalk the streets. These people are more than "tools" to be used. Backgrounds require your character to interact with other people. Even Arsenal and Resources are more

than just money and guns. Either can signify an inheritance, for example, and if that's the case then it could have entailed the death of someone close to your character.

Take the time to give your Backgrounds a "face." Give them names and motivations, even quirks. The more effort you put into your character's Backgrounds, the more rewarding they are.

Changes in Background Traits represent unique opportunities for roleplaying and should not be diminished. Although Backgrounds represent an external facet of your character, they have a profound impact on her personality. The most significant changes should come when losing a Background. Regardless of the situation, losing Backgrounds is a tremendous setback. It represents a loss of some kind, and in the scope of **Hunter**, a loss that means someone or something held dear.

Whenever your character loses a Background, think how it impacts her. Does she lose the will to carry on the hunt? Does she doubt herself and her mission? Or does it fuel her with a desire to not fail again?

While gaining Backgrounds is generally a positive experience, it also entails greater responsibility for your character — responsibility she may not be ready to shoulder.

## ALLIES

Allies are the people your character knows well and with whom she shares a bond. They may be childhood friends, parents or the staff at the local pub. Whatever the connection, allies are usually there when needed. Not everyone the character knows is an ally, though. Allies require a special bond. Friends might help out or do a favor because they're just that, but they won't usually risk their lives for your character. An ally might. The bond can be anything from motherly love to sharing a minority political agenda to a past deed your character did for an ally (rescued his daughter, helped him out when he lost his job).

Although allies are there for your character, there are limits to what they can do. The local

### CREED BOOK BACKGROUNDS

You may notice that the Backgrounds presented in the various creed books are missing from this article. As a core book to the **Hunter** line, the **Players Guide** focuses on only the Backgrounds found in the rulebook itself. Referring to the supplemental creed books would require you to own or purchase those books to make use of the material here. As a result, the **Players Guide** could not stand on its own as a companion to the game.

While the creed books' Backgrounds are not covered in detail here, the material and advice in this article serves as an adequate foundation for developing and roleplaying those Backgrounds in any **Hunter** game.

bartender may gladly bail your character out of jail, but there is little he can do to get the charges dropped. Likewise, allies have ethical boundaries — while some might look the other way about breaking the law, others won't.

One final note about allies: Unlike mentors or contacts, they are unaware that your character is a hunter, and they can't understand the monstrous truth of the world. They are normal people content to live in their safe, shielded reality, ignoring the creatures that walk among them. Not every ally will desert your character if they're confronted with the truth, but most will. They would much rather think your character is insane than perceive the world to be a lie hiding nightmares.

### ALLIES IN PLAY

Allies lends itself particularly well to roleplaying, and any rating changes are handled best during play. Regardless of the relationship between your character and her ally, this Trait demands interaction. Characters who abuse and ignore allies may soon find themselves without supporters. Furthermore, allies are not mindless slaves. They have goals and ambitions of their own.

To portray allies properly, give each an identity and create the basis of your association. You need to know their likes, dislikes and their motivations — the reasons that they're willing to help your hunter. Not only does this detailing make them memorable, it also makes them easier to integrate as a part of your stories.

Finally, you can establish your allies' spheres of influence. Like specialties for Abilities and Attributes, an ally's sphere of influence has a direct impact on what your character can expect from him. One option is to associate a Trait or two to each ally to help flesh him out. A cop could scrounge up a few leads among criminals on your character's behalf (*Streetwise*). A newspaper editor might be able to look further into a story (*Investigation*).

If your Storyteller agrees, you may assign a total number of Influence points equal to your character's Allies rating among her acquaintances. This secondary rating doesn't translate into real Influence dots for your character, but serves as a benchmark of what your hunter's associates are capable of achieving. The cop ally could pull strings at his precinct (Influence 2 — Law Enforcement), for example.

### LOSING ALLIES

*Pike stared at the blinking answering machine and finally pressed the button.*

*Beep.*

*There was silence at first, deep purposeful silence, not just dead air.*

"Mr. Flask...." A distinguished, almost Old World voice crawled from the small speaker and filled Pike with dread.

"I knew you would never agree to meet with me, so I acquired your phone number from a source."

"You needn't concern yourself with who I am. I believe you'll be more interested in what I can tell you. I thought you should know that someone close to you has betrayed you in exchange for his life."

Pike panicked. Who could know about him? What could someone be telling? He hadn't talked to Hanson since his lawyer busted Pike out of jail. Pike tried calling to thank Hanson but kept getting the runaround. Hanson was always "away." Something was up at Roman-Smythe Munitions, and Pike feared the worst.

"I could be persuaded to reveal my source — in exchange for a favor. Of course, you could try to identify my source yourself, but I know where you live and I make an offer only once."

Pike was out of his apartment before the answering machine beeped again.

As real people, allies are always at risk — almost anything can happen to them. Losing allies should have a profound effect on your character — she's either gotten a friend or loved one killed, or pushed one away because of the hunt. The result could be loss of confidence, self-doubt or even self-loathing.

Below are common ways to lose allies during play.

- **Death:** The most obvious way to lose an ally is by death — whether by accident or through the machinations of monsters. While allies give your character an advantage, their very association with her puts them at risk. Reaching for the phone and calling an ally may seem like a good idea, but your hunter must realize that she endangers their lives by involving them in matters they simply cannot fathom. Like your character, an ally can become a target. Unlike your character, an ally can't see the truth and is not empowered in any way to deal with it. Every time your character calls on her allies, she runs the risk of exposing friends and associates to the evils of the night.

- **Abuse:** Allies are your character's closest friends at some level. If your character calls her allies only when she needs something, they stop helping sooner or later. Some allies may not even be friends at all, but allies in the strict sense of the word — people who are willing to lend their help in return for something. Your character better be ready to help when an ally comes calling. If not, she could lose the Background.

#### GAINING ALLIES

"Mr. Flask?" Pratt's voice came feebly, swallowed by the cavernous warehouse.

"It's me, James Pratt. I got your message." The lawyer hesitated before stepping into a disk of yellow light projected from above. Dressed in an expensive tuxedo, Pratt was out of place in the squalor of the storehouse.

"I wasn't followed. I left my car at the theater, as you instructed. I took a cab to the subway station and walked here. I don't appreciate being brought to this part of town dressed like this, but I'm interested in what you have to say. I'm curious to know what you can tell me about Mr. Smythe's... behavior." Pratt realized he was being tested. Flask meant business.

"What's Hanson up to?" A whisper echoed from somewhere in the darkness.

"I'm not sure," the lawyer answered. "I've noticed a considerable change. I'm not comfortable with it. He's become involved with a number of business 'associates' who keep odd hours. He has me busy running a charity that helps people like you get out of trouble. It was the Foundation that bailed you out of jail. So, whatever you have to say about Smythe, you have a captive audience — perhaps we can come to some sort of agreement."

"Glad to see we're on the same page." A shape emerged from behind a crate, stopped for a second to light a cigarette, and stepped into the light. "And by the way, it's Pike. Not Peter. Not Mr. Flask. Just Pike."

Gaining Allies, like making close friends, is neither simple nor easy. Just about anyone your character meets can potentially be turned into an ally. The process takes time and isn't always successful, however. The alliance should be beneficial for both your character and the would-be ally — anything from promises of mutual assistance to favors to even binding friendship. Without this commitment on both parts, there is no alliance.

- **Networking:** One way to gain allies is to "promote" a contact. To do this, your character must somehow gain or earn the respect of the contact in question (and must have the Background of the same name). Doing so might entail doing favors or errands for the contact, demonstrating goodwill or saving her life. The freed-up Contacts point can be reassigned or dedicated to another Background.

- **Who You Know:** The other option, and this one depends solely on roleplaying, is befriending someone. Your character must earn the respect and trust of the potential ally over time. It helps when both share a goal, but the relationship can also be based on anything from a mutual interest to mutual love.

#### ARSENAL

Arsenal describes your character's possessions rather than someone she knows. It quantifies what your character owns, or has access to, in the form of firearms and specialized gear that can be applied or

adapted to the hunt. Not everyone has access to a cabinet full of pistols and rifles, however, much less to military grade weapons. For this reason, your Storyteller may limit how many points you can acquire in Arsenal. No matter how many points you have, create a plausible explanation that not only justifies your hunter's Arsenal Trait, but that supports and adds depth to his concept. A paramedic who "steals" guns and knives from unconscious gang-bangers in an attempt to keep weapons off the street might have a rating in Arsenal. But he shouldn't have a shitload of weapons "just because."

Arsenal can seem like a "faceless" Background — a laundry list of guns and ammo — but it's not. Like every other Background, it's indicative of your character's past. Arsenal doesn't automatically mean your hunter is a gun nut. While some hunters may fit the stereotype of paranoid survivalist, not every person with Arsenal needs to be one. Certain occupations and origins can explain Arsenal. A cop would probably have a dot or two. A chest filled with WWII (or Vietnam, Gulf War or "peacekeeping") memorabilia belonging to a relative might be worth a couple of dots — and might not necessarily include guns. In the latter case, Arsenal is an heirloom and has an emotional value. Finally, although Arsenal focuses on guns, it could include all manner of rare or specialized equipment and supplies such as lock-picks, rations or a GPS.

Then there is the question of legality. Arsenal doesn't always mean crates of M-16s and LAW rockets. Legal firearms might not pack the punch that illegal ones do, and might be tracked back to your character, but at least they don't attract the attention of the police as readily as automatic weapons do.

#### **ARSENAL IN PLAY**

Hunters are sometimes outnumbered by the monsters they face. Edges can even the odds, but sometimes there's just no substitute for raw firepower. A belly full of lead might not stop a bloodsucker, but at least it can slow him down — which is where Arsenal comes into play. The only limits to Arsenal are those imposed by common sense and your Storyteller.

If the Storyteller allows, Arsenal can be used as an equivalent to Contacts, focused on acquiring guns and ammo instead of information. If your character wants to purchase weapons or specialized gear once play begins, an Arsenal roll (difficulty 7) might point her in the right direction — although she still needs to come up with the cash or steal the items in question, whether it be weapons, a mechanic's tool set or welding equipment.

#### **LOSING ARSENAL**

*It was getting close to dawn.*

*Just a few more hours and the nightmare would be over, Father St. George thought to himself as he crouched*



behind a fallen tree and assessed the situation. In the distance, the howling grew closer.

His Kevlar vest was ruined, clawed to shreds. It wasn't even keeping him warm, only weighing him down. Pissed, Father St. George stripped off the vest, tossed it to the ground and counted the rounds left in his revolver — each a silver star in the gloom of the forest.

#### Four.

"Not enough for a stand-up fight, but enough to make the furbags think twice," the grizzled hunter muttered as he took up a firing position and prayed.

He would have to make every shot count.

Just because your character loses a weapon or uses up all her ammo doesn't mean she loses points in Arsenal. Some circumstances, however, do dictate that your character loses the Background.

- **Full-Auto:** The most common way to lose Arsenal is by thoroughly exhausting its supply. Losing a gun or two might not affect your character's rating, but keeping a hoard of zombies at bay for a night in a tense standoff could. Also, being reckless and trigger-happy might leave you behind an empty chamber while beset by a pack of crazed vampires. Ammo does not grow on trees. Although your character may know where to get more, it doesn't magically materialize when needed. Neither do guns.

- **Raid:** A police raid and confiscation of hunting equipment (perhaps they're tipped-off by a vampire or other enemy) warrants a reduction in Arsenal. But it could also serve as a catalyst for a story of revenge as your character gets even with the bloodsucker. Losing weapons is only part of the problem. Anyone whom your character dealt with to acquire Arsenal might be arrested, or worse might no longer trust your character. Attracting the attention of the ATF is not the wisest of moves your character can make.

#### GAINING ARSENAL

The table was covered with weapons. Not high-quality stuff — mostly surplus-grade rifles and equipment, but it would have to do. Father St. George spotted a couple of late-model Glocks. They would definitely come in handy. The priest did one last check. "What about the vest?"

"That'll cost extra, old man. You can't really put a price on peace of mind, can you?"

Father St. George hated dealing with Saul, but after his run-in with the overgrown mutts, he had no choice. "I'll give you an extra thousand."

Saul thought it over. Father St. George could see his acquaintance doing the math. Irritated, the Father slapped down a wad of bills on the table, next to a pair of grenades.

"That's nine grand, take it or leave it. There are other dealers I can go to," Father St. George lied. Saul was his last hope, and the priest didn't have a penny more.

Saul grinned. "Deal."

Arsenal is more than just owning guns. It means your character may know where to find weapons and equipment. Granted, ammo may be used up and guns lost, but your character can always find more — she just has to pay for them. Replacing a box of 9mm ammo or a pair of NVGs is easy, if expensive. Finding a new batch of silver bullets is next to impossible — and is the reason your character must be judicious in her use of Arsenal.

- **Guns 'r' Us:** The simplest way to gain or increase Arsenal is to convert Resources dots into Arsenal dots on a one-for-one basis. This represents your character selling her possessions in order to buy equipment. Doing so comes with some heavy consequences, though — it might seem like a good idea to sell the car, but your character (or her spouse) still has to get to work and drive the kids to school. Converting Resources points requires your character to have the right connections (a successful Contacts, Allies or Arsenal roll) or at least know where to acquire the gear. The conversion is not automatic, either. Your Storyteller must approve it and might schedule a quick solo game session to roleplay the potential consequences of the conversion.

- **An Honest Night's Work:** Buying equipment (whether legal or not) is not the only way to increase Arsenal. Raiding a vampire's haven might yield all sorts of gear, as does stealing from local thugs or even the police. A desperate hunter can acquire Arsenal in this manner, but she must be willing to face the consequences — and in these cases, a criminal record is the least of your character's worries.

#### BYSTANDERS

Bystanders is a precious Background. Hunters are often forced to work alone, isolated from regular folks who are ignorant of monsters' existence. At best, the imbued can count on each other, but sometimes that isn't enough, and a newly imbued hunter may not even know that others of his kind exist. Here's where bystanders can come in. They are your character's staunchest supporters, aware of her mission and the truth, and often willing to contribute to the cause that they have been exposed to only briefly.

Bystanders can arise during your character's imbuing and are probably not people she knew before. They were there when the Messengers opened your character's eyes to the monsters. Unlike your character, these people didn't act. They remained aware but transfixed, unable to do anything, and therefore weren't imbued. In the aftermath, they may have eventually sought out your character and one another — whether out of fear, confusion or even guilt — to cope with what they'd seen.

Bystanders may be aware of the horrors that prowl the night, but they're still essentially civilians caught in the crossfire. They're vulnerable and your character must always keep an eye out for them. It's one thing for a hunter to willingly battle the undead, but asking a bystander to do the same is tantamount to asking them to commit suicide.

#### **BYSTANDERS IN PLAY**

Like Allies and Contacts, bystanders are people, not tools or slaves to be used or abused. They go through all the denial that hunters do after being exposed to reality, and might help an imbued only once they've come to terms with what they saw and what it could mean to them. Even then, they help for their own reasons, not for anyone else's. Your character might have points in Bystanders, but they are not automatic helpers or simple sidekicks to boss around. Somewhere along the line, she's convinced them to help or they've come to her for answers.

To portray your character's bystanders fully, you have to flesh them out. Give them names and motivations. Even fill out character sheets for them, or encourage the Storyteller to do so. You can use the Bystander creation rules found in this book as a guide (see p. 24). What's imperative is that you understand who your character's bystanders are as real people, not as dots on a page.

Bystanders are there to help your character in her vigil against monsters. Some might provide physical assistance, acting as bodyguards or muscle in the hunt. Others can provide information, repair your character's car or do research. Bystanders do not jump in front of speeding cars for your character or risk their lives needlessly — they may have witnessed monsters and your character's imbuing, but they're neither fools nor heroes.

#### **LOSING BYSTANDERS**

*The motel room's door was open a crack. Something was wrong.*

*Sarin pushed it open a little wider. The lights were off. All he could see were vague shapes on the floor, any of which could have been Michelle. Sarin's heart raced. He gave the door a shove, and it swung wide. He flicked on the light. The motel room was a mess. Blood covered the walls, and everything was smashed.*

*Michelle was nowhere to be seen.*

*Sarin almost fell to his knees. He cursed himself for not taking her to meet his parents as she had asked.*

*Outside the motel room, a car pulled away with a screech of tires.*

*"Michelle!"*

Bystanders are regular folks who know that evil walks among them, but are largely powerless to do anything about it — aside from lending your character a hand. They might be convinced to help in



the hunt out of duty, love, fear or guilt, but sooner or later, they'll want nothing to do with your character or her divine mission. They'll want only to return to their safe and ordered lives and forget about the truth.

- **Casualties of War:** Death is the most common way to lose dots in Bystanders, but there are other risks involved. Your character's bystanders might be kidnapped or, worse, be turned into the very creatures your hunter confronts. Having bystanders usually entails a significant responsibility for your character. If she falters or lets her guard down, her companions can be hurt or even turned against her. It's one thing to stake a bloodsucking leech. It's another to decapitate one of your character's bystanders after she's been turned into a vampire.

- **Carelessness:** Your character can lose Bystanders points by treating her followers poorly or endangering their lives constantly. No matter how dedicated your character's helpers may be, there's only so much abuse or risk they're willing to take. Bystanders might stretch their necks for you a few times. Habitually sacrificing their well-being is a sure-fire way to push them away.

- **Shellshock:** Bystanders have few or none of the gifts that hunters do. They do not usually possess edges or have Conviction. Whereas your character might be able to cope with seeing a shambling corpse, bystanders can't. Witness one werewolf too many or some vampires feeding messily and your bystanders might lose their resolve and quit—or go insane. Your character's Bystanders rating is affected as a result, unless he takes pains to shelter and protect his assistants.

#### GAINING BYSTANDERS

*Sarin stumbled into the alley, Michelle's weight too much to bear in his wounded condition. He set her down gently next to a dumpster and caught his breath. She was unconscious and bleeding badly, but still alive—barely.*

*Sarin himself was in bad shape. He shouldn't have gone looking for her alone. He was lucky the creature had underestimated his resolve—not to mention his propane torch.*

*A moment later, Sarin heard the bloodsucker enter the ally. There was nothing for him to do but put up a good fight. He always feared he'd go down this way—his back against a wall and Michelle's life in the balance. It was all his fault.*

*He charged the vampire hoping to catch it off guard. It didn't work; it swatted Sarin to the ground like a fly. It was all over.*

*Just then, a thunderous roar erupted from behind Sarin. The vampire staggered back, screaming, its torso engulfed in fire. Sarin turned to see Michelle leaning against the dumpster, smoking torch in hand.*

Whereas many Backgrounds require roleplaying to be increased, Bystanders demands it. Your character's bystanders might have been witnesses to her imbuing and were exposed to the Heralds' call at the same time as she was. It's therefore difficult to increase Bystanders without some reason to justify it once play begins.

- **Failed Imbuing:** The Messengers work in mysterious ways. Sometimes, increasing Bystanders is a matter of stumbling across someone else's failed imbuing. Disoriented and lost, these failed hunters might look to your character for answers and protection.

- **Serendipity:** Bystanders may have been created at the scene of an intended imbuing. They reeled from the event, baffled and terrified by what they saw and heard. They questioned their own sanity thereafter, but couldn't put the experience out of mind. Now along comes your character, who struggles with a creature or who performs some feat that gives one or more bystanders a flashback to their previous encounter. Although these people failed to act then, they can seek to redeem themselves now by coming to your hunter's aid—or by turning to her for validation and comfort.

#### CONTACTS

Whereas Allies describes your character's associates, and Bystanders reflects her peers, Contacts represent a network of acquaintances and informants who usually, but not always, share a mutual interest with your character. Typically, contacts are not friends, but people your character knows from life *before*. A contact may be your high-school sweetheart, whom you parted with on amicable terms and who now works at the local newspaper as an editor; a bartender who's walked you home on more than one occasion; or a bum on the street to whom you've been generous. Contacts do not take a bullet for you, but they help when they can—if the price is right. While cordial and friendly, contacts aren't in the business of providing information and services for free. Allies and bystanders may bend over backward for your character. A contact needs the right motivation. Your hunter's relationship with her contacts is mercurial—a complicated affair of promises and favors. Although your character can have expectations of her contacts, she can't always trust them—and vice versa.

#### CONTACTS IN PLAY

Bringing Contacts into play is as easy as making a phone call. It takes slightly more than that to make them more than two-dimensional Deep Throat knockoffs, however. First and foremost, each should have an area of specialty, whether she

is a minor or major resource. For major contacts, the area of specialty should be a detailed concept, such as publishing, law enforcement or the legal system. Assign each major contact an Ability (Academics, Streetwise or Bureaucracy, for example). Minor contacts are more flexible; just describe their general area of specialty—underworld, street, business, information, occult.

Second, establish what your character's relationship is with each contact. Is it purely business, requiring your character to shell out cash in exchange for information, or is it more friendly? Regardless, contacts *always* require some form of payment — whether it's money, favors or even protection — in return for helping out your hunter.

Fleshing out Contacts in this manner gives both you and your Storyteller a good starting point for defining who these people are, and it paves the way to possibly make a contact into an ally.

#### LOSING CONTACTS

*Arnie staggered back into the heap of garbage that used to be his home. The cut across his forehead bled profusely. The goon stood over him, a lead pipe poised to come crashing down.*

"That's enough!" a voice hissed from down the alley. "Leave me and the 'gentleman' alone — now!" The goon hesitated for a moment and then stepped aside.

Arnie looked up, squinting through the blood. A stranger stood over him, dressed in an old kind of suit. The stranger's face was pale.

"I apologize for my associate. He gets carried away. I have a proposition for you. Here's enough money to get you a nice meal, maybe some new clothes — and as much booze as you need to drink yourself into oblivion."

"What I want in return is to know where Sarin and his little girlfriend are hiding. You can either take the money or I leave you to my associate. Either way, you'll tell me where they are."

Nothing is guaranteed with contacts. Like bystanders and mentors, contacts are vulnerable. Because the relationship between your character and her contacts is often based on mutual benefit, not necessarily friendship, almost anything can cause a reduction in Contacts rating. This Background is easy to gain, but also to lose.

- **Recklessness:** A hunter who constantly risks the lives or well-being of her contacts (to either mundane or supernatural forces) may soon find her calls are not returned. This is especially so if a contact is involved in the hunter's illegal activities, or is implicated because of the actions of your character. An ally might look the other way, and a bystander knows the risks involved, but a contact is hard-pressed to help your character in these situa-

tions. Take one risk too many and your character might lose Contacts for good.

- **Double-cross:** Contacts are in it for the money (or favors or power). Sure, they might have an understanding with your character, but who's to say they won't sell her out to a higher bidder? Even worse, they could be intimidated or coerced into betraying your character. Regardless, the trust between your character and a contact is broken and your hunter is a fool to continue counting on his source — and you lose a number of dots in the process.

- **Obligations:** A contact might do a favor or two, but abuse him and your character may be left out in the cold — and usually when she needs his help most. Unlike allies or bystanders who expect your character's assistance from time to time, contacts *always* require some sort of compensation. Fail in your obligations and your character could find herself a contact short.

- **Exposure:** Contacts are regular people content to live in ignorance of the horrors that exist. If ever confronted with your character's existence as a hunter, chances are they run — or at least consider your character a wacko, and sever any ties to her.

#### GAINING CONTACTS

*The bookstore smelled of mildew. There were books piled high on the floor and tables. The whole place had a chaotic energy to it. Sarin was surprised anyone ever found what they were looking for in all the mess. In the 40 minutes he had been there, however, the owner must have sold at least \$100 worth of books.*

The old man finally approached Sarin. "What can I help you with?" They were alone.

Sarin went straight to the point. "Someone suggested this place if I want to research some legends — without attracting too much attention."

The bookseller looked at Sarin closely, "Perhaps. But privacy comes at a price. I close at night to keep the less desirable crowd from bothering my customers."

Sarin reached into the envelope his father had given him, took out a \$50 bill and handed it to the store owner, "About this 'less desirable' crowd.... Where do they usually hang out?"

Gaining Contacts is as simple as meeting the right people. Almost anyone can become a contact — at least a minor one — as long as your character is willing to do her homework and grease a few palms.

- **Referral:** Contacts know people. If a particular contact can't help out your character, and the two are on good terms, the contact might point your hunter in the right direction. Of course, a small kickback often helps extend your character's network.

- **Legwork:** Sometimes, your character has to hit the streets to find contacts. This might involve buying

someone dinner (or whatever it is they want) or getting them drunk. This approach might require a Charisma (or Manipulation, depending on the method used) + Subterfuge roll to work. More than that, your character must demonstrate that her friendship (or cash or protection) is beneficial to the would-be contact.

## DESTINY

Your character is marked for greatness or tragic failure. She possesses some quality that makes her stand out in the hunt. Perhaps that's why she was chosen to hear the message, perhaps not. Other imbued regard destined hunters as lucky, tenacious, even single-minded — which gives them a subtle distinctiveness that makes them special. When faced with overwhelming odds, your character somehow manages to squeak by. Everything might not always be rosy, but with Destiny luck is on your character's side — at least until fate knocks and the moment of truth arrives.

### DESTINY IN PLAY

Destiny may grant your character a chance to re-roll failures, but there's more to this Background than a simple mechanic. Although your Storyteller has the ultimate veto as to what precisely your character's destiny is, you can and should take an active role in fleshing out this Background. How does your character relate to this "blessing"? How does Destiny manifest? Does your character see visions or hear voices, or is it more subtle, a feeling in the pit of her stomach, perhaps?

One way to personalize Destiny is to pick a "specialty" for it. Maybe your character's Destiny manifests as "confidence," "toughness," "sacrifice," "greatness" or even "hope." Choosing a simple noun as a label for Destiny goes a long way toward adding depth to your character. It also makes it easier for your Storyteller to choose a fate that fits your character and your concept of her. If she's "confident," other hunters, and maybe even monsters, may rally to her to achieve a great feat or to meet a terrible end. If your hunter is "sacrificial," other hunters or even people may sense that she has been marked for some specific trial or fate and help her achieve it — or seek to avoid her and going down with her.

### LOSING DESTINY

*The car ride was quiet. They still had another 12 hours before they got to L.A. Carrie and Spaulding sat in silence as the desert flew past at 80 miles per hour.*

Everyone thought Carrie was mute. She wasn't. She just hadn't said a word since her 12th birthday. The doctors never found anything wrong with her or learned what trauma caused her silence. She just stopped speaking. Sitting in the car next to Spaulding, driving to a place she had already seen in her mind,

*she knew the time to speak again would come soon — and it scared her.*

Ephie's death had affected Carrie more than the others suspected. Her actions had caused the death of someone she knew — that she loved. It shattered her confidence. For the first time since she heard the voices, she doubted herself. All she wanted to do was reach out and tell Spaulding, but she couldn't.

*Carrie was afraid.*

People can and often do walk away from destiny. It's a tremendous responsibility to bear knowing that so much hinges on you. To some, including your character, fate might not be a blessing, but a curse. Destiny always requires a sacrifice of sorts, and there are times when your character is unwilling or unable to pay the price. The consequence (and there are always consequences) could mean the loss of this Background altogether.

- **Acting against Destiny:** Ignoring the pull of destiny is an easy way to sever your character's ties to the ephemeral quality that makes her special. A character fated to greatness might lose Destiny points or the Trait if she acts in a cowardly manner. This is why choosing a specialty for Destiny is important; acting adversely can undermine your character's appointed role. If your hunter's destiny manifests as honor or hope, betraying people might have a detrimental effect on her Background rating, for example.

- **Doubt:** Just because a character has Destiny, it doesn't make her superhuman. It's one thing to suspect that fate is on your side. It's quite another to believe it. Doubt is anathema to destiny. Self-doubt plagues the greatest of heroes, and sooner or later a doubting character could question her actions and confidence to such a degree that she is not only uncertain, but crippled by indecision. A point or two of Destiny could be lost in the process.

- **Abusing Destiny:** Destiny lets you choose to retake any roll you fail, to the limits of your Background rating. It doesn't mean you *should*. Sometimes failure is as much a part of destiny as success is, and setbacks on a mission should be accepted and learned from. Turning to Destiny to avert every annoyance that comes along abuses your character's appointed status. Abuse Destiny and your character runs the risk of "crying wolf" too often. Your Storyteller might penalize you if you frequently default to Destiny when you fail a roll. Use Destiny with caution and respect.

### GAINING DESTINY

*The coffee was stale, but it was the best anyone could expect at 3 a.m. Spaulding looked down at the tar pool coalescing in his mug and then at his mute companion.*

Her silence was annoying. Spaulding didn't even know her name. It was like she was from another planet. But something was obviously bothering her. She seemed even more withdrawn than usual. He'd noticed a marked change over the last couple of days. It seemed the closer they got to L.A., the more restless she became.

Finally, he said something about it. "Ephie respected you, you know. She admired your confidence and nerve. Coming from Eph, that meant a lot. We all miss her. I guess we have to accept death as part of what we do. All we can hope is that when our time comes, we take down some of the bastards with us."

Spaulding's quiet companion stopped playing with her piece of pie, scribbled a note on a napkin and slid it across the table.

My name is Carrie.

"Well Carrie, why don't we finish our coffee and get out of here?"

For the first time in days, Carrie smiled.

Your character is either blessed or cursed with Destiny, or she is not. It's highly unlikely that a character acquires Destiny during play — but not impossible. Destiny makes an excellent Storyteller reward after your character survives a particularly harrowing hunt or suffers a great victory or defeat. Gaining Destiny is not a simple matter of saying, "I have my character do X so I can gain Destiny," and scribbling down the dots. If you want your character to acquire the Destiny Trait, your Storyteller probably makes you earn it through a particularly challenging or personally trying story.

- Sacrifice:** Sometimes, it takes a loss to understand just how important destiny is. There are times when destiny seems to work against your character, such as when a loved one dies and it could just as easily have been — or should have been — your hunter who was lost. In truth, such loss actually makes Destiny stronger. Although sacrifice leads or pushes your character off her intended path, it can also have the opposite effect. It might reinforce her commitment to a goal and warrant a Trait increase.

- Blessing:** The Messengers might bestow upon your character, thanks to her actions on the hunt, what amounts to extra Destiny points. Working in their ever mysterious ways, the Messengers have perceived something of note in your hunter — and know she must fulfill some greater purpose as the end times near. You might gain the liberty of re-rolling dice, but your character could acquire the dreadful sense of being the direct agent of the Heralds.

## EXPOSURE

Whether it comes flooding back in visions, dreams or the occasional "gut feeling," your character suspects more about the supernatural than do other hunters.

Exposure is not neat, codified knowledge. Rather, it is a matter of instinct and intuition. When confronted by a towering man-beast, a hideous bloodsucker or something that otherwise just doesn't make sense, your character might have an inkling as to what she really is facing. She might remember that staring into a vampire's eyes makes you into its slave, or she might once have seen a wolf-man disappear just by staring into a pool of street water. Exposure is not always informative or correct, however. Sometimes, memories are jumbled and confused — but it's better than charging into a situation blinded by absolute ignorance.

### EXPOSURE IN PLAY

Exposure is really nothing more than an educated guess, half-glimpsed memory or inexplicable sense, but when confronting the supernatural even a hunch is better than nothing. Exposure is not a Talent or Knowledge, and just because a character has it doesn't mean she is a walking encyclopedia on the occult. At best, the information imparted by Exposure is fleeting and imprecise — suppressed memories bubbling to the surface that make sense only now that your character has been made aware of the true reality surrounding her.

Exposure is not gained from "dabbling" in the occult. Exposure comes from actual contact with monsters that your character couldn't understand — until now.

Although Exposure might give your character insight about almost any horror she witnesses, some remain unfathomable. Jot down a line or two about the source(s) of your character's Exposure and then work them into your character concept. Doing so might help your Storyteller judge the difficulty of your Wits + Exposure rolls. If your character was once attacked by a stranger and found unconscious afterward, it's possible that she now intuitively senses more about vampires than, say, ghosts (so a difficulty of 6, not 8 or 9, for vampires).

### LOSING EXPOSURE

Marcy opened her eyes painfully, the bright lights of the hospital room burning them. Everything was hazy. She felt sick and nauseated. What happened?

It all came back slowly... the van, the fear, the pain. She reached for her neck, but the bite marks were gone. She was still alive — barely. Marcy sighed in relief.

She heard someone enter the room, but she couldn't see whom. "Sarin, is that you?"

Silence. She couldn't see anyone, but she felt a presence — a cold, suffocating energy. She struggled to get out of bed.

She understood that some creatures could make themselves invisible if they wanted to be, but this presence was something new. There was something

else in the room with her and Marcy didn't know what. All she could do was hope Sarin wasn't far when she started screaming.

It's difficult to lose Exposure. The Trait represents your character's memories and feelings, not friends who can be killed or guns that can be stolen. Certain events can trigger a loss of Exposure, however. After a particularly traumatic encounter with the supernatural, your character's mind might try to suppress the memory — resulting in a reduction of Exposure dots if the Storyteller deems it appropriate.

- **Madness:** If your character acquires a derangement for whatever reason, there's a chance she might lose some dots in Exposure. This loss reflects your character suppressing memories or losing her grasp on reality. Her delusions and insights become intertwined so that it's nearly impossible to distinguish fact from fiction. For example, a character with Paranoia might believe she sees the walking dead everywhere she looks — tainting any awareness gained by Exposure.

- **Repression:** The mind can do just about anything to protect itself from what it can't or doesn't want to deal with. If your character suffers a near-death experience or some other horrific trauma thanks to the supernatural, there's a chance

she blanks it all out in a desperate effort to retain her fleeting sanity — losing Exposure points in the process.

- **Supernatural Influence:** It's impossible to have Conviction and its attendant mental protection from supernatural influence active at all times. There's always a chance a monster with mild-altering powers might erase your character's recollection of events or alter them with false impressions. Your character might temporarily or permanently lose Exposure points as her memories are altered or eliminated. If your hunter's memories are ever restored, the creature responsible for tinkering with them is likely to be the subject of her ire — and could be the very subject of past encounters with the unknown.

#### GAINING EXPOSURE

Gorman trailed the vampire. He didn't think he'd been spotted. "That's it, take me to your hole." He could hardly contain his excitement. Tonight would be a good night.

A half-block later, the vampire crossed the street suddenly — he was fast, faster than Gorman could follow. The hunter broke into a trot as he stepped off the sidewalk... and was almost hit by a speeding taxi. Gorman leaped out of the way, taking his eyes off the vampire and slamming his fist onto the hood of the cab.

When he resumed his pursuit, the vampire was gone.



Frustrated, he scanned the street and saw nothing. Then, for some reason, he focused on a small stairwell bathed in shadow. There was something about the darkness there. On any other night, Gorman might have overlooked it. But the way the shadows seemed to hang made Gorman flash back to a childhood memory.

He remembered walking home one night, past the old house at the top of the street, just knowing something watched him from within. Gorman's mom never believed him, and sent him to bed without TV. But Gorman knew better — he still did, and he got the same feeling now.

*He laid one hand on the crowbar that was tucked under his coat and walked straight toward the stairs.*

Exposure is like a revelation — you never know when it will hit like a bolt of lighting and grant your character an inexplicable or unnerving understanding of the horrors she battles. Hunters confront the unnatural on a regular basis, so there's always a chance that your character could develop Exposure based on past encounters. Your character's very nature as a hunter makes gaining Exposure easy.

- **Epiphany:** Your character can have an epiphany about an event from before her imbuing. Perhaps the conditions of a current scene or experience have to be just right to remind your hunter of something she witnessed or suffered *before*. Suddenly that past experience makes sense (say, the cold feeling in a room of her old house was the result of a haunting and protective spirit) and has bearing on current developments (a ghost dealt with now might also be protecting something important to it). This sudden realization might now allow your character more insight into ghosts, and might be the doorway into other old, suppressed memories about the supernatural in general.

The Storyteller could bestow this benefit upon your character through story events, or you might seek it by petitioning him and elaborating on your character's identity and past.

- **Blessing in Disguise:** Failure is a traumatic experience, but given enough time a hunter can learn a lot from her mistakes — if she survives, that is. Any time you botch a roll when your character confronts a monster, there's a chance the next time she confronts a similar monster that she gains insight as to why she failed — and acquires an extra dot in Exposure. This "blessing in disguise" applies only if your hunter does not have Conviction active at the time she makes the initial botch.

Although this approach to increasing Exposure does not involve the "traditional" supernatural encounter before the imbuing, hunters are still human and their post-imbuing experiences might offer preternatural insight into subsequent efforts.

## FAME

Whether a hunter is a pop idol or a local hero, Fame makes him a celebrity. Everyone recognizes the hunter or, worse, wants to be his friend, and cameras follow everywhere he goes. For good or ill, your hunter becomes a public icon. This state has definite advantages. Complete strangers are more likely to lend a hand to someone they consider "famous." Cops might look the other way. Bouncers are all too happy to let your character enter clubs. Secretaries might be convinced to let your hunter take a look at the boss' files.

Fame doesn't always mean life is a bed of roses for your character, however. People might adore and even respect him, but fame does come at a price — lack of privacy. Regardless of his level of Fame, your character's every action can be subject to public scrutiny, whether by his peers or nationwide fans. People might recognize your character, usually at the worst times. Hunters are often forced to live double lives to keep family and friends in the dark. With Fame, such efforts are challenging or impossible, and loved ones might be linked with your character by the enemy itself.

### FAME IN PLAY

While all the public exposure might be an annoyance (although some hunters might thrive on it), it does have its benefits — something clever players can exploit. You must establish what makes your character a celebrity. Not every character with Fame is an actor or rock star — and given Hunter's common-folk theme, a character is more likely to be famous for something he did rather than for who he is. A fireman who risked his life to save a mother and her child; a local politician who campaigned to keep the regional factory from closing; a shopkeeper who fought back against robbers: All are excellent examples of actions that might make a character famous.

Part of deciding what makes your character well known is choosing the cross-section of society in which he's popular. Just because your character has fame doesn't mean everyone recognizes him. At higher levels in the Background, this may be the case, but at low levels only a limited group of people recognize your character. Is he a TV star, a neighborhood leader or even an infamous criminal?

Fame does have its drawbacks. Does your character have groupies? How about stalkers? The most detrimental effect of Fame is your character's public exposure — it becomes easy for his enemies to find him and others near and dear to him. The flip side is that being famous also protects your character. The authorities might dismiss an attack on a

nobody, but an attack staged against a celebrity could attract enough attention to dissuade potential enemies.

#### Losing Fame

Dave needed a story — badly. It was almost 2 in the morning, and he had nothing. His editor would have his ass if he didn't come back with something. He scanned the police frequencies in one last, futile attempt. His car smelled of cigarette smoke and gyros. Dave hated the graveyard shift.

He was about to give up when it hit him. Literally. A body plummeted down and crashed onto the hood of his car. Slamming on the brakes, Dave spilt his coffee all over himself. At least it hid the piss stain. Scared witless, he stumbled out of the car.

In a panic, he looked up to see where the body had come from. A window was smashed out of an office building a few floors up. Someone looked down at him — someone familiar. Dave knew him somehow. It was that guy, Jamal Wilson, who'd saved a kid from wild dogs a few weeks back. The man backed away from the window.

"Hey, stop!" Dave yelled, but Wilson was gone.

Dave couldn't believe it. A story of a local-hero-gone-bad had just landed in his lap. He turned toward his car to check the body's pockets for identification — and saw only his smashed-up Ford.

The body was gone.

Fame is fleeting. Today's sensations find themselves relegated to the realm of the has-been sooner rather than later. Unless your character works to maintain her public persona or becomes a de facto celebrity, chances are that her Fame rating fluctuates or even evaporates. That 15 minutes lasts longer for some, but it ends eventually for just about everybody.

- **Passing Fad:** People's attention span is measured in seconds; today's news is forgotten tomorrow. If your character does nothing to promote herself, she might lose one dot per week in Fame as her exploits are demoted from cover story to page nine.

- **Neglect:** Fame requires money to maintain it, or your character can lose it. For the most part, a character with Fame must look the part. It costs money to keep up with the latest fashions and to be seen at all the trendy clubs. This effort requires a sufficient Resources rating (perhaps 3 or more), but only if your character wants to become a "celebrity."

- **Bad Press:** They say any press is good press, but that might be stretching things. Most characters with Fame are respected and adored, and anything that taints their reputations has an adverse effect on their Fame scores. Notoriety and infamy are not the same as fame. Your character must be careful not to get into trouble, not only because she's a hunter and excess



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attention usually leads to death (or jail), but because her fans might abandon her.

#### GAINING FAME

*"Mr. Cohen, is it true that you're not going to charge Jamal Wilson, or even launch an investigation to verify the story published about him? Is this all part of your campaign to support the recent outbreak of vigilantism in our city?"*

The district attorney looked tired, his hand was being forced and he didn't like it. "We are not charging Mr. Wilson because there is no evidence. And no, we are not investigating. Mr. Wilson is free, and unless something else turns up, this case is closed."

*"But the chief of police feels an investigation of an underlying pattern to Wilson's behavior is warranted. He said so publicly."*

*"The chief is entitled to his own opinion. If you ask me, he should focus on policing crime, not harassing heroes like Mr. Wilson."*

Fame is one of the easiest Backgrounds to develop during play — all your character has to do is be at the right (or wrong) place at the right (or wrong) time while the cameras are rolling.

- **Film at 11:** In the age of the video camera and instant news, any character can unwittingly become the focus of attention in the blink of an eye. Whether your character is filmed by accident during the taping of *Cops* or is a budding artist discovered by a local critic doesn't matter. Hunters, by virtue of their duties as protectors, cross paths with news-hungry reporters at some point or another. Unless your character takes steps to prevent this collision, her face might wind up plastered across the front page of a newspaper or flashed on the evening news, resulting in points of Fame.

- **Working the Crowd:** Characters who devote time and energy to promoting themselves can increase Fame easily. Granting interviews and signing publishing or movie deals are all ways your character can improve Fame — if she wants to.

- **Burgeoning Talent:** Being famous isn't only about looking pretty or saving people. On rare occasions, talent is noticed for its own sake. If your character has any skill in Expression, Crafts or Performance, there's a chance she makes it to the big time — along with a dot or two of Fame.

#### INFLUENCE

Whereas other characters might need the favor of an ally or the services of a contact to accomplish something, a hunter with Influence may be able to do it on her own. If your character has Influence, she has the ability to make things happen — when and how she wants them to. Although it doesn't always translate neatly into authority or even a title, your character has the capacity to sway or

coerce people through her presence or contact. Influence can stem from something tangible (a police badge or incriminating evidence), a position (lawyer, politician) or from intangible qualities such as respect, confidence or fear.

Influence allows your character to effect change and throw her weight around. A character with Influence might be able to get a warrant executed on a vampire's haven, or to dig up incriminating evidence on a corrupt politician. Like Fame, Influence is a visible Background requiring your character to have a public position. It reflects your hunter's standing and pull within an organization or community. Obviously, the larger the community or organization, the more dots you require in this Trait.

#### INFLUENCE IN PLAY

Influence is rife with roleplaying potential. Not only is it normally used in social situations where roleplaying is paramount, it requires your character to take an active role, though it might be a small one. The Trait can make your character a public figure of some sort — or at least someone known in her region or profession, whether she's a respected preacher, a city councilor or assistant district attorney. Influence also requires you to describe your character's range of power. A cop might have a dot or two — good enough to get people investigated or a search warrant executed — but there's no way the same cop can call in favors from the mayor's office (at least not normally).

Influence can also be applied to criminal channels. Blackmail and extortion can give your character pull. Going this illicit route is obviously dangerous, but it gives your character an alternative (some would say a prerequisite) to pursuing political avenues.

#### LOSING INFLUENCE

*Houston had a massive headache. For the longest time, he lay on the floor trying to figure out what had happened.*

*He'd come home after having a few beers, opened the door, turned on the light, saw someone or something run out the living room and then bam, he was hit. It hurt his head just to remember.*

*Houston got to his feet.*

*His place was a mess. Almost everything was broken. Someone had gone to great lengths to look for something. The question was what?*

*Through the haze of his headache, it dawned on him — his photos of the bishop!*

*Houston staggered to the kitchen. The fridge was out of place. He didn't need to look behind it to know the pictures were gone.*

Influence has the potential to fluctuate greatly during play. One false move or overstepping bounds can have dire repercussions on your character's Influ-

ence rating. The world of politics and intrigue is unforgiving, with no room for rookies or amateurs.

- **Scandal:** If your character's influence is the result of a public position, then almost anything she does during the course of the hunt can cause a rating decrease. Influence grants your character significant power, but also requires that she respect certain rules of decorum — not to mention the law. Even if your character has acquired her influence by illegal means, she must be careful not to get caught, targeted for revenge or accused of betraying her own kind.

- **Checkmate:** Your character's influence pales compared to the hold some monsters are reputed to have over the system. If your character becomes too much of a nuisance, she might find herself out of favor and her Trait crippled thanks to the machinations of the enemy. It takes more than edges to compete with the undisputed masters of intrigue.

#### GAINING INFLUENCE

*It was late, and Judge Sorben walked across the parking lot like a man who wished he was already at home. Otherwise, the lot was empty.*

Houston scanned the lot from the shadows, double-checking that no one else was around. Confident, he approached the elderly man from behind.

"Judge Sorben?" The old man jerked as if by a heart attack. He spun around to face Houston and tried to press his Cadillac's panic button, but he succeeded only in dropping his keys.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Don't have a cow. I'm a... friend of a friend." Houston handed the judge his last snapshot, the one he'd stored in his safety deposit box. He'd been smart enough to keep this one in a separate place — and besides, it was the most incriminating of them all. "I just want to have a little chat."

The judge looked at the picture. He was shocked. Houston seized the opportunity.

"We're both men of principle. You can do what you want with that picture. I just want to know if I can count on you in the future?"

Sorben looked at Houston. The old man's eyes narrowed to slits. For a moment, Houston wondered if he'd made a mistake. Maybe the bishop and the judge were in cahoots, after all.

"You have done the congregation a great service," the judge said as he shook Houston's hand. "What can I do for you?"

Gaining Influence is all about politicking. Even if your character doesn't hold a title or any real authority, she can use her connections to build her reputation and standing. It helps to have Allies and Contacts to supplement your character's Influence rating. With-

out them, networking is challenging and it's almost impossible to acquire more points in Influence.

- **Public Office:** The easiest way to increase Influence is by climbing the political or corporate ladder. There's only so much a beat cop can accomplish by flashing his badge, but a detective or sergeant has significantly more sway. Becoming an elected official or an executive in a company requires ambition, dedication and perseverance. Increasing Influence in this manner is best suited as the focus of a story or even a chronicle of its own. Although such hard work can be daunting for your character and filled with countless risks — especially when it must all be reconciled with the hunt — such a story can be extremely rewarding.

- **Climbing the Ladder:** Procuring favor with or over increasingly important people/groups is another means of increasing Influence. Befriending (or blackmailing) a judge's clerk might eventually get your character an audience with the judge — and a corresponding increase in Trait score. Going this route allows your character to use her Influence dots as stepping stones to higher, more powerful individuals. Gaining the ear of the mayor might be impossible at the start, but if your character sets her sights lower (say, on the mayor's press secretary or advisor), anything is possible in time.

#### MENTOR

Hunters are largely alone in their calling. Your character might have allies or know bystanders, and might even work alongside other imbued, but ultimately her success or failure on the hunt and in life rests on her alone. Being a hunter can thus be a very lonely and strenuous proposition, which is why mentors are coveted and respected. There are no "Hunting for Dummies" books or informative Discovery Channel shows to guide your character, much less teach her how to use her powers or survive from one night to the next.

Mentors alone can help your character face the dangers to which her imbued nature exposes her. Although not every mentor is a wise sage, the knowledge and experience your hunter gains can mean the difference between life and death. As long as your character has a mentor, she has someone to turn to when the going truly gets tough.

Not all mentors are hunters — nor does all their wisdom revolve around the hunt. They are less instructors and more guides. Your character learns as much as she's willing to learn from her mentor. Such a teacher doesn't test his pupils; life does. A mentor prepares your character as best he can to face challenges. Anything else is icing on the cake.

**MENTORS IN PLAY**

First and foremost, not every mentor needs to be the stereotypical "mystic on the mountain"— or even wise for that matter. After all, a guide is just another person, like your character. An instructor has simply seen and done more than your hunter has, even though it probably doesn't involve monsters. You or the Storyteller should establish the mentor's identity. Start by choosing a Nature and Demeanor and work from there. Is your character's mentor kind and patient, or is he a taskmaster ready to chide his student for any mistake? Also determine why he chooses to direct your character, or why he accepts her requests for instruction. Does he see something in her, a spark of genius, or is your character just in need of a friend?

The obvious benefit of having a mentor, apart from his assistance and wisdom, is that he makes learning some Abilities easier. Without the Mentor Trait, a character must learn and improve her Abilities the hard way — by going to school or through hours of practice. Although having a personal teach doesn't negate effort on your character's part, it makes the process easier. Learning Demolitions is not something your hunter can study at the local community college, but a mentor might be willing and able to teach your character how to make explosives — if he knows how himself.

**LOSING MENTOR**

Spaulding was exhausted. The drive had nearly killed him. He promised himself he would fly next time. At least Carrie was doing better than she had previously, though.

The phone rang, but Spaulding already knew the news. He didn't know how he knew, he just did. He'd felt Zeb's presence leave him about a day after he and Carrie had left for L.A... He had tried to ignore it during the drive by focusing instead on the road and on his mute companion. Half of him wanted never to stop driving. As long as Spaulding stayed on the road, he wouldn't have to admit that Old Zeb was gone. That was why, Spaulding guessed, he'd been so irritable with Carrie.

Spaulding felt empty inside. Nothing mattered anymore. He let the phone ring and drifted to sleep.

Death and injury are by far the most common ways to lose Mentor points during play. If your hunter's connection to her mentor is ever discovered, chances are he becomes a target in the war with the supernatural. Losing a teacher is a tremendous blow to your character — and depending on her relationship with her mentor, it might even shatter your hunter's confidence.

The loss of your character's one and only mentor eliminates all points in this Trait. If your character's mentor had a subordinate or replacement who might

take his place, your Background score may simply be diminished by the loss of the primary guide.

- **Training Is Complete:** A mentor might be a guide and a teacher, but there comes a time when the student must leave the master. This usually occurs after your character overcomes a great challenge (which might be the focus of the student-master relationship) such as coming to terms with her father's death; after which she no longer needs a father figure. Coming of age as a hunter makes for an excellent subplot or solo story.

- **Lack of Discipline:** There is only so much a mentor can tolerate from a pupil. If your character constantly disagrees, disobeys or ignores her mentor, he may simply abandon her. A master-student relationship is based on trust and respect. Without them, there can be no learning. Your character need not adhere slavishly to all her mentor's teachings, but she must show proper respect and dedication.

- **Exposed to the Hunt:** Mundane (non-imbued) mentors cannot be enlisted in the hunt. Should your character divulge her greater mission, her mentor may turn his back on her or at least try to "help" by getting her treatment or by encouraging her to seek medical assistance "for her own good."

**GAINING MENTOR**

"How long have we been doing this together? Five weeks? Six?" Devon asked.

Gorman took a long swig from his bottle. He was tired, hurt and frustrated. On top of it all, he hated when Devon got all fatherly.

"Long enough. I know what you're gonna say, but I don't need help. I'm dealing with it just fine."

Devon sighed. He'd seen this happen before. Gorman was a good kid. A little young, but he showed promise. "Look, I won't tell you how to live your life. But if you don't wise up, you're gonna get killed. If that's your choice, fine. But the next time you just throw yourself at them, I may not be there to save your skin."

Gorman stood up and walked out. He hated when Devon was right, but he wasn't ready to admit it... not yet, anyway. He still needed someone.

It's rare for a character to gain dots in Mentor once play begins. The Mentor Trait usually remains constant, is lost completely or diminishes after character creation. Increasing rating or gaining the Trait from scratch is another matter. For your character to acquire a mentor, she must find someone willing to take her under his wing. Doing so requires legwork and dedication. Not every instructor is willing to take on new students, so your character might have to prove herself and earn the respect of a potential teacher.

- **Hunter-Net:** Hunters can count on each other — at least some of the time. Inexperienced, naïve or simply lost hunters sometimes stumble across more experienced imbued who may be willing to show them the ropes. Not every hunter your character meets jumps at the opportunity (in fact, most don't), but that doesn't mean one can't be different or can't change his mind.

- **The Prodigal Returns:** There are times when old lessons must be re-taught, and a wise mentor is always there for his pupil — even if the student interrupted his training for whatever reason. Should your character suffer a setback in life or the hunt, there's a chance a previous mentor surfaces to help her back to her feet, thus restoring any lost Mentor points.

- **Relationship:** All relationships change with time. What might have begun as a master-student relationship could evolve into true friendship (or even love). This tighter bond might result in a higher Mentor rating for your character — but also the increased responsibility of maintaining the relationship.

## PATRON

While all hunters are agents of the Messengers, characters with the Patron Background are truly blessed (some say cursed) by them. No one really knows what distinguishes one hunter from another in the view of the Heralds — if such beings even exist. If your character has Patron, she may rarely be alone as she faces the creatures of the night. Indeed, wherever your character goes or whatever she does, the Messengers may always be present, incessantly reminding her to the point of near insanity of her ordained mission. Most hunters who know the benefits — or miseries — of Patron do so from their imbuing or shortly thereafter.

None of which makes patrons into guardian angels. They may seldom appear to your character, and if they do they probably won't have bright halos or harps. Nor do they suddenly whisk your character away from danger (as far as she can tell). The Messengers can't be perceived, understood, defined or categorized, much less controlled. They are an enigma that drifts in and out of your character's life — for good or bad.

At best, they work obliquely through subtle, easily misunderstood and disorienting clues. This guidance might manifest as luck, seeming coincidence, visions, epiphanies or sudden premonitions. You and your hunter should never know whether patrons have been at work, whether your character is actually mad or whether things simply happen because they do.

## PATRONS IN PLAY

Patron is largely under the control of the Storyteller. Your character can't call upon the Messengers like she can Arsenal or even Influence — it's not a mystical 911. Patron is a Background that puts your character in the passenger seat — and this is what makes it such a potent roleplaying tool. Through it, your Storyteller can impart all sorts of information, not only about the story but about the setting and backstory of your chronicle.

Unlike the other Backgrounds, the less you know about Patron the better. Still, you might describe and detail how the Heralds tend to communicate with your character (signs, visions, "luck") to give the Trait its own unique flavor and to give your Storyteller some direction. And just because your character has the Trait doesn't mean she *must* believe her visions. For all she knows, she's going crazy.

Patron does bestow some tangible benefits, however. Other hunters might recognize the mark of the Messengers on your character, thus earning her a level of respect and status. There's something about your character, some ephemeral quality, that makes other hunters take notice or that makes them nervous. Perhaps an eerie calm surrounds your hunter — until the Heralds make contact, anyway. The key is to make these side effects of the Background subtle enough that others may dismiss them or, alternatively, have even further cause to suspect your character's sanity.

### LOSING PATRON

"I miss you Rachel."

Rachel looked across the room and tried to ignore the man drooling in the corner. And the woman chasing imaginary whatever's by the window. She hated visiting Jack. She hated the hospital. More than that, she hated Jack for not letting go of his "visions." Rachel finally looked at her husband.

"I can't do this anymore. I just can't take it, and it's tearing the kids apart. They want their daddy home. So do I." Rachel had to fight back the tears.

"You of all the people should understand. Please...."

"Not anymore. I want my life — our life — back the way it was. No more voices, no more hallucinations." Rachel stood up. "I love you Jack, but not like this," she said, and walked out of the room.

That night, when Nurse Jacobs gave Jack his pills, he didn't flush them down the toilet. He swallowed them and dreamed of Rachel and the kids.

The Messengers move in mysterious ways. Although Patron seems to establish a link between your character and these beings, it is a tenuous and capricious one. Your character might sense that he has a purpose and that the Messengers chose him for a

reason (perhaps he has the Destiny Background, too). But when that goal is fulfilled, your hunter has played his part and the Heralds seem to turn their attention elsewhere. Contact from them diminishes or stops altogether, reflected by a decrease or loss of Patron points. Or maybe your character chooses to consort with the enemy for his own reasons, and the Messengers appear to turn their back on him thereafter. Regardless of the reason for a Trait decrease, losing Patron points is a significant event in your character's life. Although she seems to gain something of a normal lifestyle again — as much as can be expected in a world overrun by monsters — a distinct vacancy remains where the Heralds once lingered. Your character is no longer "special."

- **Lack of Faith:** Patron can require faith — not necessarily religious faith, but a dedication to the hunt and a hope that whoever creates hunters and intrudes upon your character's life does so for the best. The Heralds are enigmatic and unfathomable. If your character repeatedly ignores their messages or neglects her role as one of the imbued, the Messengers might withdraw their support.

#### GAINING PATRON

*The phone rang, pulling Spaulding slowly back from the abyss of sleep. It must have rung five times before he was even aware of it.*

*He wasn't sure what time it was or even what day it was. The hotel room was dark. The television showed snow that mirrored Spaulding's own dim awareness.*

*He wanted nothing more than to slip back into the peace of sleep. But the phone kept ringing.*

*Spaulding swung his legs out of bed and stared at the phone. He didn't want to answer.*

*Again it rang.*

*In defeat, he reached for the phone. The momentary silence that followed was bliss.*

*"Hello?"*

*"You are not alone." The voice was Zeb's.*

*"Zeb? Zeb!"*

*The line went dead. Suddenly, Spaulding didn't feel lonely anymore. He knew that somehow, somewhere, Zeb was looking out for him.*

Gaining or increasing Patron is purely the prerogative of the Storyteller — there is little you or your character can consciously do to attract the attention of the Messengers. Like Destiny and Exposure, Patron is potentially awarded or imposed as a result of your hunter's success or failure at a significant development on the hunt. There are a few things your character can have or do in hopes of gaining the Heralds' favor, however.

- **Faith:** Just as lack of faith or determination in the hunt might cause a drop in Patron rating, putting faith in the Powers That Be can open your

character's eyes to the grace of the Messengers. Your hunter has to be willing to put her money where her mouth is. That doesn't mean taking needless risks, but it requires your character to carry out her mission with vigor — even in the face of overwhelming odds.

- **Humbleness:** Hunters are normal people caught up by abnormal events. Characters struggling to reconcile the hunt with their daily lives might get some help from the Messengers when they least expect it, almost as an act of divine kindness, if that's possible.

#### RESOURCES

Resources is a measure of your hunter's possessions, ways and means, pure and simple. Whereas Arsenal determines what kind of specialized gear she owns, Resources describes the stuff your character has packed away in her closets, the kind of home in which she lives, and the job she maintains. Compared to the other Backgrounds, it's all too easy to ignore or forget about Resources. But that belies the importance it plays in your character's life.

Hunters are regular people: They have jobs. They have families to feed. They pay taxes, and they want to buy what's advertised on TV. Without Resources, your character is destitute. She might have a small apartment, but cash is always a problem. Surviving the hunt is hard enough without having to worry about your character's next meal or where she's going to sleep. Bystanders and Destiny are good to have, but having a roof over your character's head or being able to buy a round of drinks have their own benefits.

Resources are even more important if your hunter has a family or dependents. No hunters were loners waiting around to be imbued. They were mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters with obligations to meet, bills to pay and responsibilities to fulfill. The hunt not only risks the life of your character, but the financial well-being of the people she loves.

It might be tempting to skip out on work or buy a crate of explosives, but there are always consequences to bear in mind with Resources.

#### RESOURCES IN PLAY

The most obvious use of Resources, other than establishing your character's standard of living, is to buy things. There's no need to meticulously keep a tally of every dollar your character spends, as long as she doesn't go buying Saabs every other day. If a dispute over Resources ever comes up, the simplest way to handle it is to roll your character's Resources as a dice pool against a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. Success means your character has enough funds. Failure means a bounced check. Simple.

Resource dots can also be traded in for Arsenal (and vice versa — see Arsenal, above), if your hunter has both Backgrounds. Keep in mind, however, that doing so requires your character to sell possessions such as her home, car or something else valuable.

#### LOSING RESOURCES

Withdraw Amount: \$2000.00

Amount Exceeds Balance: \$1367.67

Enter New Amount: \$1360.00

Withdraw \$1360.00 from Savings?

Yes

New Balance is: \$7.67

Thank You for banking with First Federated.

Michelle walked away from the ATM with a heavy heart. She'd been saving up for a trip overseas since she was 12. She had the itinerary memorized. Fly to Paris, take a train to Berlin, backpack up to Norway and take the Trans-Siberian to Hong Kong.

The whole idea seemed childish now: a far-away dream that had no place in a world where evil was real. It made her feel silly — and sad. She got into Sarin's car.

"You sure you're fine with this? We can always get jobs and lay low. We have the last of the cash my father gave me. That should last for a few more weeks if we're careful."

"I'm sure," Michelle hesitated for a brief second. "I planned on traveling with Marcy.... Let's just get out of here."

Losing Resources points is far too easy for a hunter. The mission imposes all sorts of demands that make keeping a steady job difficult. Your character needs equipment, and it's not as if the Messengers provide her with an extensive health plan. Like it or not, your character must pay the bills.

- **Upkeep:** Regardless of how your character receives her Resources (job, inheritance, lottery), she needs to work at it to maintain her standard of living. Your character must actively manage her Resources or she stands to lose them. Every dot in this Trait requires a *minimum* of one business day per week to maintain. This effort can be handled during downtime, but your Storyteller needs to have a vague idea of how your character makes money or he might penalize your hunter by reducing her Resources rating.

#### GAINING RESOURCES

Father St. George had hit it big this time. The zombie must have been a packrat. Its lair was crowded with junk — really old junk. Most of it was useless: pictures, diplomas, diaries and whatnots. Stuff that wouldn't be missed, so St. George left it behind.

The tackle box tucked away at the back of the closet was more interesting, however. It contained jewelry, mostly antique pieces. The cameos alone would be worth a few hundred, the rings and earrings thousands.

Of course, St. George wouldn't keep all the money. He would give some to the parish and some to Gorman. The rest would go toward paying bills and getting new clothes — and if there was some left over, a nice dinner and a bottle of wine at Da Vinci's....

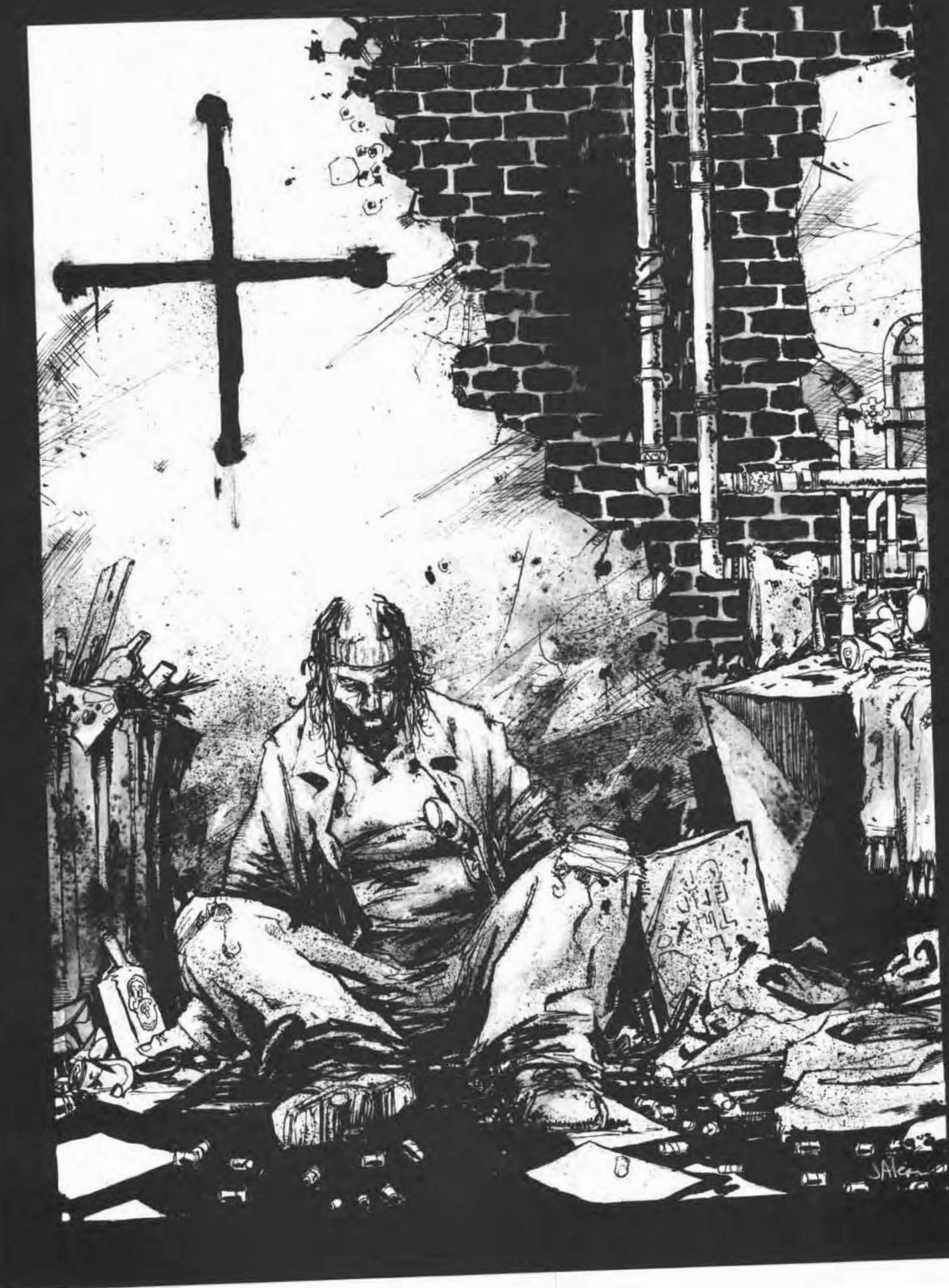
The priest turned to leave, but hesitated. Rot or not, what St. George was doing was still stealing. He looked at the tackle box, took out of few of the pieces and buried the rest with the remains of the zombie.

The simplest way to increase your character's Resources is to get a new or second job. The nine-to-five routine might not coincide well with a hunter's calling, but it's the only sure-fire way of paying the bills and putting food on the table. But finding a job is neither easy nor is it necessarily something you want to roleplay, so it's best handled during downtime between stories.

If your character needs cash, fast, here are some suggestions.

- **Crime:** Regardless of what people say, crime does pay — but only if you don't get caught, which is phenomenally hard to do. Some hunters rationalize crime as a lesser of two evils, becoming modern-day Robin Hoods by stealing from monsters while defending humanity. Crime, however, is the first step toward becoming no better than the nightcrawlers your character confronts.

- **Loan Sharks:** Catering to the desperate, loan sharks are an easy way to increase Resources — with interest rates measured in bodily harm and injury. Every city has its share of bottom-feeding scum willing to lend cash. Whether your hunter can pay them back is another story. But if she needs to increase Resources fast, this is the way.



# CHAPTER 4: THE MEASURE OF HUMANITY

*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

— 1Corinthians 15:54

Knowing who your **Hunter** character is, from his job to his love life to his innermost fears and desires is important to playing the game. This familiarity helps you portray a realistic, human person — just like you and everyone you know. It also helps you portray and understand what your character goes through and how he responds when exposed to the truth of the World of Darkness. And just like you, your character is subject to change, whether based on an invigorated bond with his previous life — or a rejection of it — or on an evolving perspective of what's important in the hunt. Your character is no more static or inflexible than you are. This chapter helps you get to know who your character is and how he can change during the course of your chronicle.

## CHANGING CREEDS

Hunter's creeds are easy-to-understand labels that we use to describe character mentalities. They're ways of looking at and dealing with the horrific truth of the World of Darkness. They're frameworks from which hunters may seek to change reality, whether to tear down every monster, to heal the

wounds that enrage the beasts, or to find other worlds in which to live, free of the tyranny of evil. Because the creeds are outlooks and perspectives — not formal clubs or organizations — they're not overt or plain. Indeed, the imbued themselves are more likely to consider each other first in terms of race, gender or religion than in terms of values in and aspirations for the hunt.

So creeds are a handle used to identify general character beliefs and thoughts. They're internalized and as complex as the motivations and hopes of the people who are defined by them. Thus creeds, like human ideals and values, are subject to change. Human nature is never set in stone. People change as they gather life experiences and hunters are no exception. The World of Darkness is crawling with inhuman terrors. As the imbued learn more about them, hunters' attitudes about reality, the supernatural and existence itself alter. So too can their responses to the questions and dangers that monsters present.

There are many reasons why a hunter might change creeds, as many as there are imbued. A Defender who witnesses a skinchanger save his wife may

rethink his attitude toward monsters. Instead of seeing them as a single unified group, he might accept that not all monsters think and act alike. He may also feel indebted to a monster that did a better job of protecting his loved one than the Defender himself did. Likewise, an Innocent who allows a rot to survive only to learn that the thing is a maniacal killer may undergo a similar change. Her guilt and overwhelming remorse may undermine her belief in monsters as victims and inspire her to take a more aggressive, militaristic stance toward the other side.

Changing creeds can be as simple as saying, "I'm sick of attacking every bloodsucker we face. It's getting us nowhere. There has to be a better way." Because it's a matter of identity, belief and goals, changing creeds is a matter of roleplaying. There are no hard-and-fast rules for seeing a better way and making a life-altering direction change. If you sense that it's time for your character to change focus, to take another route on the hunt, all you need are some simple guidelines—and a lot of roleplaying initiative.

**Note:** These suggestions for changing creeds in an ongoing chronicle—not simply during the prelude or shortly thereafter—are optional. Your Storyteller may or may not allow this concept for a variety of reasons, depending on the needs of the story and the tone of your game.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Each Virtue promotes a few general attitudes in the creeds that fall under it. The following sections offer guidelines on why hunters may move to or from a Virtue (and probably creed), focusing mainly on the storytelling aspects of the change. The mechanics discussed under each Virtue are meant to reflect a hunter's fluctuating state of mind as he accepts new ideals and goals, and abandons old ones.

When hunters change creeds, they probably change Virtues as well. A Martyr who has an epiphany in his "career" may change from the Mercy to the Vision Virtue, for example. Because primary Virtue changes are so common when creeds change, this article focuses on Virtue changes for ease of discussion, with creed changes being implicit—you know what creed your character leaves behind, and which he chooses to uphold hereafter.

It's possible, however, to change creeds without changing primary Virtues. The change involves only a slight perspective alteration on the hunt, but a difference nonetheless. These changes involve moving to creeds under the same primary Virtue—Defender to Judge (Zeal) or Redeemer to Innocent (Mercy), for example. These intra-Virtue transitions are also addressed in this article.

Note that hunters who are already Hermits or Waywards, the lost creeds introduced on p. 16, may not change creeds as a rule. Likewise, hunters or other creeds, even Visionaries, cannot become Hermits or Waywards. The lost creeds have such extreme frameworks and outlooks that it's impossible for them to adopt other, less abstract perspectives. They are inaccessible to hunters of other creeds for the same reason.

In game terms, a hunter's primary Virtue rating (that which governs his creed) cannot normally be exceeded by a rating in another Virtue. Thus, a Judge with 4 Zeal cannot have 5 Mercy or 6 Vision. When a character changes creeds and Virtues, his rating in his new primary Virtue is probably lower than his old primary score is. If that Judge becomes a Martyr, his new primary Virtue is, say, 2, compared to his old primary Zeal score of 4. This seeming "breaking of the rules" comes at a price—the price of changing creeds. Until your character's new primary Virtue score is increased to match or exceed his old primary score, he is subject to the restrictions listed under his new primary Virtue, below. In the case of our Judge, he is subjected to the penalties described for the Merciful.

Now, it's possible that your hunter's new primary Virtue score is equal to his old one when he changes creeds and Virtues. Say that Judge has 4 Zeal and 4 Mercy before changing, for example. If old and new primary ratings are equal, your character suffers none of the restrictions discussed below. Your character already feels enough of an affinity for his new calling that his change isn't radical enough to cause him any significant frustration, soul-searching or lament.

For example, a Visionary with 3 Vision and 3 Zeal maintains a very balanced stance between the two Virtues. He tries to keep an eye on the big picture of the hunt, especially in making long-term plans, but he doesn't let his view of the horizon obscure his perspective on the here and now, especially when a creature clearly needs to be destroyed. He's willing to take up arms against monsters in order to build a better today, but not at the risk of a better tomorrow. When a suitably tragic or revelatory event compels the Visionary to become an Avenger, the transition between Vision and Zeal is relatively easy—at least in terms of mechanics. The character suffers none of the penalties discussed under Zeal.

There is one other circumstance that makes it challenging to change creeds and embrace new philosophies and beliefs. Normally, your character's highest rated edge in his creed path cannot be exceeded by an edge in any other path. That is, a Redeemer with the level-two Redemption edge can-

not have an edge from any other path rated three or higher. When a hunter changes creeds, the highest rated edge of his new path is likely to be less than that of his previous path. In that case, your character also suffers the creed-changing penalties detailed below until his new primary Virtue is raised sufficiently, and until his highest rated edge in his new path equals that of his old path. So, if that Redeemer becomes a Visionary, he suffers penalties for chang-

#### NEW CREED, SAME VIRTUE

Your character can certainly change creeds under the same primary Virtue, say from Avenger to Defender or from Martyr to Innocent (Visionaries, Hermits and Waywards cannot acquire each other's creeds, as explained elsewhere in this article). Because such a transition involves no primary Virtue change, the only factor that may delay full acceptance of your character's new creed is the level of edges he possesses. His highest level edge in his new creed path must equal that of his old path before he completely comes to grips with his outlook on the hunt. Until that time, you can risk Conviction only on edges that belong to your character's new creed — not on any edges that he possesses from his old creed, or on any edges that belong to other creed paths. Thus, if your Martyr becomes an Innocent, and had a level-two Martyrdom edge, your character must acquire a level-two Innocence edge before you can risk Conviction on edge rolls for anything apart from Innocence powers.

Although changing creeds within the same primary Virtue seems beneficial compared to changing to a creed of another primary Virtue — say, from Judge to Redeemer — there actually is a drawback. Both your character's old and new creeds confer new edges with the same pool of Virtue points. If your character advances to, say, level three in the Avenger path and then switches to Defender, he might never feel wholly comfortable with his new creed and remain caught between them for the remainder of his life as a hunter. That occurs because you have spent 6 Vision to acquire the level-three Avenger edge. You have only 10 Zeal to spend on powers. Attaining the same level of Defender edge would cost a total of 12 Conviction — which is impossible to attain. You could therefore never risk Conviction on edge rolls for anything but Defense powers for your Avenger-turned-Defender. Such is the danger of changing courses late in a hunter career, and in directions that cover much of the same ground.

ing creeds until his Vision equals his Mercy score, and until he attains the level-two Vision edge.

Of course, as with Virtues, the edge levels your character has attained in his old and new paths may be equal when he changes. The Redeemer might have the level-two Vision edge before he changes creeds. In that case, he is that much closer to being a fully functional Visionary and may use all his edges and capabilities without hindrance.

Please keep in mind that the following commentaries on the creeds are not rules. The description of each creed is meant to give you examples of the "how's" and "why's" behind changing creeds. Read them for inspiration, not dictation. Ideally, you'll get some insight into why a hunter changes creed, and maybe you'll learn a bit about how the creeds relate to each other. But please don't assume that each description is some sort of how-to guide or recipe for changing creeds.

Theoretically, your hunter could change creeds multiple times in his career. As long as you can acquire the Virtue points and necessary edges, repeated changes are possible. In practice, changing creeds more than once or maybe twice is unlikely. Each transition can mean a radical difference in personal beliefs and outlook on the mission. One such redirection is emotionally and intellectually challenging. More than one can be devastating, because everything your character used to value or uphold is essentially forgotten or set aside. It's as if his life until that moment has been wasted, and no one takes such revelations lightly. Compare a creed change to learning about, becoming immersed in and dedicating yourself to a religion or career — and then dropping it for a new one. How often does that happen in a normal lifetime?

#### ZEAL

Raymond stared at the ceiling above his hospital bed. The skin under his casts itched like hell, but it was a small price to pay for saving Harry. He'd do it again in a second. Would the others be able to get along without him while he was cooped up here? Raymond thought so. He hoped so. Harry was always getting on him about taking dumb risks and getting hurt. Maybe he should tone it down. There was strength in numbers, and he was useless to the others while he was in the hospital. Still, someone had to take one for the team.

His train of thought was interrupted by the phone. He picked it up with his good hand and pressed it close to his remaining ear.

"Hello."

He recognized Sarah's voice immediately, but it was thick with fear. She spoke in ragged bursts, as if she was



trying to catch her breath: "Ray, listen to me. Do exactly what I tell you. The hideout's gone. They got almost everyone. Don't contact me. I don't think anyone is left. I'll find you when I think it's safe. Look out for yourself."

She hung up, or so Raymond thought.

He tried to keep his sobs quiet. When the nurse arrived he was able to collect himself enough to convince her not give him a sedative.

*How could that have happened? What went wrong?*

Over the next few weeks, something cold and hard formed at the core of Raymond's soul. His days of taking hits for others were over. He had to hit the enemy, hit it hard, and never give it a chance to hurt anyone again, not even him.

Raymond stopped at a pawnshop on the way home from the hospital. The clerk gave his bandages a funny look, but she still helped him pick out a small arsenal of guns.

The three Zeal creeds are oriented toward meeting and defeating monsters. Hunters who come into Zeal from another creed are often enraged by a distinctly unpleasant experience with a creature of the night. Zeal demands forceful, outward action. Zealots express the hunt not through thought or reflection, but by going out there and meeting the enemy head on, do or die. The other Virtues empha-

size introspection, contemplation and long-term planning. Zeal relies on forceful extroversion, action and rapid adaptability, whether at all times or when a Zealot feels the time is right, such as when a creature intrudes on a Zealot's territory or a creature's actions are indisputably in the wrong.

Gathering the anger, self-righteousness or disgust to become a Zealot may occur over time. It usually happens after a single traumatic event, though, such as losing a loved one to a monster, discovering that a dear friend has become a creature, or facing betrayal at the hands of a trusted monster. Any embers of anger that a hunter previously suppressed now burst into a red-hot inferno. Newcomers to Zeal are likely to take a fanatical, unquestioning approach to the hunt.

Hunters who already follow a path of Zeal are generally intolerant of other hunters who change creeds. Zealots typically maintain a straightforward us-versus-them outlook. This stance tends to breed a siege mentality, which often spurs suspicion of or resentment toward imbued who stray from their own callings, no matter what they are. Zealots tend to categorize both the imbued and the creatures of the night. Any who unexpectedly cross boundaries are treated with mistrust.

**AVENGERS****Reasons for Joining**

The most common reason for a hunter to seek Vengeance is personal loss. "Avenger" is an apt title for those who come to this creed late in their hunting careers. They've sometimes lost comrades and loved ones to monsters that they trusted, and now they seek to even the score. Another common motivation is frustration with the hunt. Talking and investigating might help win the war in the long run, but those activities don't do much for tonight's victims. Latecomer Avengers tend to become the most gung-ho, do-or-die hunters, as if they hope to make up for lost time.

**Perspectives on Changing Creeds**

Avengers are the imbued least likely to accept another hunter's change, or perhaps even the thought of changing creeds themselves. Because Avengers put emphasis on confronting the supernatural directly, they need to feel secure around their fellow hunters. To an Avenger, a hunter whom she can't trust to watch her back is no better than the enemy. Even an Avenger who moves to a different Zeal-focused creed is held in suspicion. Avengers tend to look down on those who stray from the path, viewing them as cowards, traitors or weaklings. An Avenger who takes up a new outlook on the hunt altogether can count on an icy reception from his old, vengeful comrades.

**DEFENDERS****Reasons for Joining**

Hunters who become Defenders late in their careers can usually point to a moment of dreadful clarity. For many imbued, the hunt is a dangerous game that must somehow be kept out of their personal everyday lives. Friends and family are one of the few refuges for hunters, and every imbued is terrified by the thought of losing them to the forces of darkness. What pushes that terror into a commitment to defend and protect is typically concrete evidence that a hunter's actions placed his loved ones in danger. A hunter who finds detailed files on his family in a rot's lair may no longer be willing to let his loved ones out of sight. Alternatively, a single loved one may be lost to the enemy, inspiring a hunter to ensure the safety of the rest with all his being.

**Perspectives on Changing Creeds**

Defenders tend to look at everything in light of their charges. A hunter who changes creeds isn't likely to elicit much of an extreme reaction from a protector. That changes, though, if her charges are brought into it. If the Defender benefits from another hunter's creed change, she's all for it. If a previously pacifistic Innocent decides to take up arms against all monsters, a Defender can embrace the change because it gives her

a new ally in keeping her charges safe. If she loses support due to another's creed transition, she's likely to make her one-time ally a pariah. A previously steadfast and supportive Martyr who veers down the path of Vision, eager to learn the truth behind monsters, can earn a Defender's cold shoulder.

Defenders tend to feel the weight of the hunt quite heavily. They see the price of failure whenever they spend time with whomever or whatever they value most. Therefore, they aren't likely to accept a change, no questions asked. A Defender may not actively avoid a hunter who changes creeds, but she is likely to drop him to the bottom of her list of people she can trust until she sees proof that she can afford to believe otherwise.

**JUDGES****Reasons for Joining**

Judges are often the field officers and tactical planners of the hunt. It stands to reason, then, that hunters who come onto this path from another see the need to take command of others as a result of their experience with the enemy. A raid that comes apart because of allies' failure can inspire a hunter of one creed to take up the role of the Judge. Less commonly, a hunter may adopt this path because of contact with a Judge whom he considers incompetent or careless. Another Judge who regularly bungles planning and investigation can be faced by a fellow hunter who has decided that someone else must take charge. Finally, some hunters are so repulsed by the immoral or abusive actions of their fellow imbued or other people that they take up the path of Judgment to police their own.

**Perspectives on Changing Creeds**

Judges tend to take one of two views of hunters who change creeds. If a Judge plays an important advisory role in bringing about another hunter's creed change, she's apt to feel a bond with that person. On the other hand, if a Judge is caught flat-footed by an ally's change in behavior and beliefs, she's likely to feel betrayed and abandoned, much as an Avenger is. Judges consider themselves caretakers and planners. If another hunter is obviously unhappy with his role, it might be up to the Judge to help resolve his feelings and make him an asset to the hunt again. Judges can be remarkably flexible when they feel that they work in the best interests of the mission. Conversely, if a Judge feels that a change comes about capriciously (especially if the Judge isn't involved in the process), she might no longer trust one of her own people.

**CHANGING FROM MERCY TO ZEAL**

The Mercy creeds are largely the functional opposites of the Zeal creeds. When a hunter changes



his primary Virtue from Mercy to Zeal, he moves from the forgiving, sacrificial or hopeful to the aggressive, protective or decisive. This change is reflected in how you can risk Conviction points. You cannot risk Conviction on Mercy-based edges when confronting a monster directly. Thus, if your Innocent becomes a Defender, you can't risk Conviction on rolls for edges that derive from the Innocence, Martyrdom or Redemption paths. You can certainly risk Conviction on Zeal-based (and even Vision-based) edge rolls.

This restriction reflects a hunter's newfound fervor for dealing with monsters aggressively, and violently when necessary. The old ways — discussion, sacrifice, redemption — have failed. Putting faith in them again now (represented by you risking Conviction in edge rolls in the presence of a monster) is an admission of defeat and weakness. Once your hunter's Zeal rating is equal to his Mercy rating, and his highest rated edge of his new creed path equals or exceeds that of his old one, your Conviction restriction is lifted. At this point, your character has come to terms with the emotion or drive that compelled him to change creeds. He still adheres to a Zeal creed, but he can now resort to his old ways (you can risk Conviction on Mercy-related

edge rolls in the presence of monsters) without feeling guilt or weakness.

**Example:** David is changing creeds from Innocence to Vengeance. He's stumbling through the city sewers on the trail of a rot when four zombies suddenly lurch toward him from the shadows. David may use Hide to avoid the zombies, but his player can't risk any Conviction on the attempt. David knows that his best option is to lay low and avoid the creatures, but his new bent toward confrontation keeps him from putting his heart fully into any compassionate or forgiving effort.

#### CHANGING FROM VISION TO ZEAL

Vision typically involves a philosophical rather than an outraged approach to the hunt. Vision demands introspection, analysis and long-term thinking. Zeal demands action, cunning and a quick response. The Visionary who changes to a Zeal creed responds like a desk-jockey cop assigned to a tough street beat. He flinches, panics and goes a bit over the top until he's used to thinking on his feet. Contemplating change and personally bringing it about are two radically different activities. This divergence in attitude is reflected in how you can risk Conviction. Whenever your character activates a Vision edge when facing a monster directly, you cannot risk Conviction on that edge. In

this period of transition, your character cannot analyze a monster calmly, but instead wants to destroy it. Once your hunter's Zeal rating equals his Vision rating, and his highest rated edge of his new creed path equals that of his old Visionary path, this restriction ends. Your character is now accustomed to the rigorous demands of hunting monsters and is able to reconcile that with his previous, broad outlook on the hunt.

**Example:** Sue recently changed from a Visionary to a Judge. If she wants to use Foresee before entering a supposedly haunted house, her player may risk Conviction on the edge roll. If she encounters a spirit once she enters the house, her player may not risk Conviction on Foresee or any of her other Vision edges while the spirit is present. Sue's new attitude compels her to engage the creature, not observe or contemplate it.

#### MERCY

Cynthia was in the bar, even though it was a week-night. Robert didn't know what to make of that, but it probably wasn't a good indicator. Her eye caught his before he could duck into the crowd. She descended on him like a hawk, moving across the bar with her fluid, athlete's grace. Resigned to his fate, Robert tried to muster a smile as she drew close.

"Fancy meeting you here," she said over the pounding frat rock.

"It's a free country," he said.

Her contemptuous smile drove his eyes away from her.

"You should know better than that, after what we've seen," she said.

"Let's not get into this again. There's nothing more to say."

"I think there is. Like, 'Nice of you to turn your back on your friends,' or 'How did you become such a wimp?'"

She was working her way up to it. He could sense it coming. "Look, just because I think we can reason with whatever's out there doesn't make me a wimp. We committed murder last week, even if he was already dead."

"Tell that to every person that freak killed."

"He never killed anyone."

"Did that bitch Jennifer tell you that?"

There was the first part, Robert thought.

"Are you sleeping with her yet, or do you have to talk to more monsters first?"

And there was the second part. Robert hoped he could get away from Cynthia before Jennifer showed up. The last thing he needed was the two of them going at it in a bar. Sometimes, he wondered whether the monsters ever had doubts, ever fought amongst themselves.

He prayed that they did.

Mercy is a path of support and comfort. Innocents reveal the humanity lurking behind monsters' horrific exteriors (and behind hunters' rage and obsession). Redeemers bring out the good in others while containing the evil. Martyrs sacrifice themselves so that others

do not suffer harm and become twisted by it. Mercy comes into its own when hunters face monsters and other imbued as equals. Not every battle is fought with bullets and knives, and the war for a creature — or a hunter's soul — is just as important as that for a city block. Depression and regret turn a soul just as thoroughly as can abuse and anger.

Hunters who move to Mercy from the other Virtues often use their old methods to pursue their new, compassion-inspired objectives. That is, they rely on old methods until they are fully at ease with their new callings (their creed transition is complete). For example, a Judge who becomes a Martyr may systematically compile a list of area hunters, cataloging what they need and what he can do to get it to them — at least until he can give of himself for its own sake. A Visionary who becomes a Redeemer still strives toward long-term goals, but those goals focus on saving souls and turning around people and beings gone wrong — at least until saving souls becomes a major goal in and of itself.

Hunters who follow Mercy tend to support and aid other hunters who change creeds. A supportive Innocent, Redeemer or Martyr is just what the doctor ordered when a hunter changes creeds. The Merciful want to help an ally become well-adjusted and reasonable — unless his new role is antithetical to the goals of the Mercy-based creeds.

#### INNOCENTS

##### Reasons for Joining

A hunter can become an Innocent late in his career under very special circumstances. Innocence thrives on optimism and idealism, two traits that the hunt usually wears down rapidly. But sometimes, in the midst of the confusion and fury, an imbued gains a profound sense of understanding, a sudden realization that the other side isn't all bad. A change to Innocence is often spurred by an encounter with a surprisingly sympathetic monster, one that aids hunters or even fights against other creatures on humanity's behalf. Another common push to Innocence is other hunters. Overzealous or downright bloodthirsty imbued can force your character to reflect on the hunt and decide that violence might not be the only solution. Alternatively, a fellow hunter who never lets her optimism for the mission or her faith in others falter may be inspiration to other imbued, perhaps even the angry or jaded, showing them how to aspire to the same uplifting ideals.

##### Perspectives on Changing Creeds

Innocents want those around them to be content and secure in their roles as hunters. Thus, they tend to support imbued who recognize when a change in

objective or purpose is necessary. Innocents recognize the inner turmoil that can plague a hunter in transition, and they work to assuage the mental and emotional anguish a change can cause. If a hunter's new role goes against an Innocent's views on the hunt, the Innocent can cast himself as the "misguided" hunter's conscience, trying to show her that her old path or another one is better. The Innocent tries gently, though persistently, to sway the other hunter to a more tolerant outlook on the hunt.

#### MARTYRS

##### Reasons for Joining

Most Martyrs are born, but a few are made during the course of the hunt. Hunters who come to embrace Martyrdom tend to do so after making some terrible mistake. Perhaps a Judge throws together a plan at the last moment and watches his allies die. A hunter who owes his life to the kindness and support of other chosen may decide that the only way to thank them is to follow their path. Whatever the reason, hunters who feel they have a debt to pay to the hunter community sometimes take up Martyrdom.

##### Perspectives on Changing Creeds

Martyrs, as part of their drive to alleviate the pain of others, tend to be very supportive of hunters who decide to change creeds. The key difference between Martyrs and other Mercy-based hunters, however, is that Martyrs are willing to support a hunter who takes up a path that runs *against* the devoted's personal beliefs. That doesn't mean a Martyr can't show a hunter-in-transition a better way, though. Where an Innocent might act as a hunter's conscience to steer him onto a different course, a Martyr can be compelled to displays of sacrifice and heroics. Such efforts are meant to demonstrate to another hunter that the Martyr's beliefs are so right that he is willing to die for them. In the Martyr's mind, such evidence should sway a fellow hunter who seeks to follow a hurtful or callous path. If the Martyr's demonstrations fail to sway the other hunter, he at least tried and must now accept who the other becomes, or turn his back on the other hunter completely (and turning one's back may not involve any sacrifice for the mission...).

#### REDEEMERS

##### Reasons for Joining

A hunter who becomes a Redeemer often undergoes an experience that forces him to stop asking how to destroy or examine monsters and hunters, and how to save them. He doesn't necessarily lose his enmity for the enemy, but he learns that rehabilitating souls might be a bit more important than, and not necessarily bound to, destroying monsters. A hunter who has lost several allies in the fight is a typical candidate for becoming a Redeemer, because he seeks to support

new allies rather than encourage their destruction. Sometimes, a Redeemer sways other hunters to his path through the use of his edges, especially when those abilities save identities and lives that conventional medicine cannot. Other times, a burned-out hunter may decide that the only battle that he can possibly wage with some hope of victory is keeping his friends' spirits and ideals alive. An encounter with a penitent or regretful monster can also push a hunter toward Redemption. He might recognize humanity in a monster that he would otherwise destroy, and he realizes that working with it is better than working against it.

##### Perspectives on Changing Creeds

A Redeemer who watches a fellow hunter change creeds is often careful to assess the direction of the hunter's change. If the hunter takes a path that coincides with the Redeemer's ideals, the savior can be among the hunter's most trusted supporters, surpassing even other Mercy-focused hunters in offering care and support. A hunter whose move challenges the Redeemer's beliefs may find himself with a relentless new enemy, one who might not attack him directly but who does everything possible to limit and hamstring the hunter's efforts along his new course. Redeemers are careful to put beings that they can help in one group and those that must be contained in another. This distinction applies equally to hunters who change creeds.

#### CHANGING FROM VISION TO MERCY

Transitioning from a Vision creed to one of Mercy requires a hunter to set aside guidance and contemplation, and to take up support. It's a subtle but important difference. Rather than searching for answers to the hunt, the former Visionary now seeks meaning in hunters and the hunted themselves. Many Visionaries who take up Mercy are often filled with a sense of guilt for treating others so objectively in the past. Until this guilt passes, the Visionary feels uncomfortable reverting to his old ways. You cannot risk Conviction when your character uses Vision edges directly on hunters, people or monsters. In his heart, your Visionary feels uncomfortable detaching himself from others and treating them as impersonal objects. This restriction is lifted when your character's Mercy rating equals his Vision rating, and his highest rated edge in his new creed exceeds or equals that of his highest Visionary edge. At that point, your Merciful is sure enough of his own feelings and his new mission that guilt and frustration over his old ways fades.

**Example:** Paul moves from Visionary to Martyr. If he wishes to use Delve to find out what happened on a street corner, his player may risk Conviction on the attempt. If he

wants to use *Delve* to find out what happened to a friend of his or what a monster has been up to, his player may not risk Conviction. In the first case, Paul examines something inanimate. In the second case, Paul reverts back to his old practices, looking at a human or being from a dispassionate distance.

#### CHANGING FROM ZEAL TO MERCY

Former Zealots can work hard to deny their old violent methods and beliefs, clinging tenaciously to their new compassionate, forgiving ones. They become staunch advocates of nonviolence and try to see monsters in the most sympathetic light. If your hunter changes from a Zeal creed to a Mercy creed, you may not risk Conviction when using Zeal edges directly against monsters, people or other hunters. Much like a transitioning Visionary, a former Zealot can feel guilt and remorse over his old ways and is loath to resort to them again. This restriction remains in place until your hunter's Mercy rating equals his Zeal rating, and his highest rated edge in his new creed equals or exceeds that of his old creed. Over time, as your character reconciles his old beliefs with his new ones, he may once again call upon his old edges as effectively as ever. He now has control of his anger and hostility, and he knows that he can wield and control violent powers without being a victim of them himself.

**Example:** Joanna moves from Avenger to Innocent. Her player may risk Conviction on a Cleave roll if she uses it to batter down a door. If Joanna is confronted by a rot, however, her player is unable to risk Conviction on Cleave when using it against the creature. In the first case, Joanna uses Cleave as a tool to deal with an inanimate object. Such actions aren't violent ones against a being who potentially has a soul. In the second case, she reverts to her old ways of dealing with monsters angrily, something that she cannot put the full force of her beliefs behind now that she is on a path of Mercy.

#### VISION

"Dammit, say something!" Carl roared, his voice reverberating in the dingy basement.

"I'm not an advisor, Carl. I'm just an observer," Kerry replied in carefully measured tones.

"But you used to help us. You led us. You guided us. Things went so much more smoothly then. Did we piss you off? What did we do?"

"It's not you, Carl. It's me. Remember how I told you we needed to take a step back from what we were doing and look at it rationally, that we needed to plan our moves?"

Carl nodded enthusiastically. Any reminder of the "good old days" of two months ago brought a smile to his face.

"Well, let's just say I decided to take another step back from there. It isn't enough to ask what should we do. We need to ask why we're doing it."

Carl didn't bother to try to stop Kerry as she turned to leave. She's pissed at us, he thought to himself, Or something like that. All Carl knew for sure was that, as his ex-wives would agree, he could never understand women.

Vision demands that its followers stand in neither the monster's shoes, as Mercy requires, nor the victim's shoes, as Zeal insists. Instead, Vision is concerned with the big picture. It compels hunters to perceive and understand the greater forces at work behind the hunt. Victory and defeat are irrelevant if no one really knows how to define them. Visionaries come to a fork in the road and, instead of choosing a path, wonder why someone decided that this place would be a good one for the trail to split. Vision is the path of distance, revelation and detachment. It takes no sides and often asks why there are any sides at all.

#### VISIONARIES

##### Reasons for Joining

Frustration can drive hunters of other creeds to become Visionaries. Fed up with fighting small battles that never seem to truly weaken monsters as a whole or to hold any hope of winning the war, a hunter may decide that the struggle is useless unless he knows what he fights for (and against) and why. Finding no satisfactory answers from those around him, he might take up his own personal quest for meaning and solutions. Sometimes, the reality of the hunt overwhelms a hunter and forces him to try to understand his situation. Some rots are mindless killing machines, whereas others seem tormented by their own existence. Skinchangers operate in bizarre ways that often have nothing to do with human society. Frustrated and confused, these imbued take a step back and hunt for meaning instead of monsters.

##### Perspectives on Changing Creeds

Visionaries rarely care either way if another hunter changes creeds, unless that hunter becomes another Visionary. Many Visionaries take a paternal approach to newcomers and offer to guide them along their new path. At the same time, many Visionaries see such hunters as means to learn how other creeds tick, from someone once intimately involved with one. New Visionaries usually face a bizarre mixture of charity and inquiry from their seeming mentors.

#### CHANGING FROM MERCY TO VISION

A hunter who moves from Mercy to Vision still retains his desire to empathize and heal. Although he now wants to question the world and learn its secrets, he still retains some affinity for people rather than institutions or concepts. To reflect this, when your hunter moves from a Mercy creed to Visionary, you may risk Conviction on a Vision edge only when using the edge in a situation that directly involves helping or showing sympathy for a

human, hunter or monster. This restriction is lifted once your hunter's Vision rating equals his Mercy rating, and his highest rated edge in his new creed equals or exceeds that of his old creed. When your hunter has learned to look at the world with an impartial eye, without a bias for or against anyone, he is finally comfortable with his new role as a long-range thinker and planner.

**Example:** Louise was once a Redeemer, but she now treads the path of the Visionary. Her player cannot risk Conviction on Foresee to figure out which button she should press to make a machine shut down, because she is used to applying her edges to understanding people and monsters, not situations. Her player could, however, risk Conviction if Louise wanted to know how her next action might affect a cornered rot. She deals with a thinking, emotional being in this situation, to which she is far more accustomed. Once Louise completes the transition to Visionary, she is more willing and adept at focusing her Vision capabilities on theory and concepts alone.

#### CHANGING FROM ZEAL TO VISION

A hunter who moves from the Zeal to Vision primary Virtue in some ways faces the opposite challenges of one who moves from Mercy to Vision. The Zealot is comfortable facing monsters with some sort of detachment, and when considering fellow hunters as assets rather than as people. That detachment is aggressive, dismissive and perhaps ruthless, however. It's not based on curiosity, interest or consideration as is the true Visionary's. A Zealot tends to look at monsters and ask "How?" whereas a Visionary looks at them and asks "Why?" This difference is an important but subtle one in understanding how Zealots and Visionaries differ. When your character goes from a Zeal-based creed to Visionary, you cannot risk Conviction on Visionary edges *when using them directly against monsters*. The conflict is simply too infuriating or righteous for your hunter to take a step back and analyze the situation more objectively. This restriction is lifted when your hunter's Vision rating equals his Zeal rating, and his highest rated Visionary edge equals that of his old creed. When this catharsis is achieved, your hunter can accept that a long-term view of the hunt is more important than short-term, aggressive action.

**Example:** In contrast to Louise's dilemma, Jim, an ex-Avenger, is comfortable using Foresee while working with a machine. His player may risk Conviction on the attempt because Jim is used to approaching the hunt from a somewhat inhumane angle. When faced with the rot, however, his old beliefs and actions conflict with his emerging ones. He's used to considering the rot an enemy. That lingering impulse makes it difficult for him to focus on how

the rot fits into the greater scheme of monsters, hunters and the world, so Jim's player can't risk Conviction on applications of Foresee that involve the monster.

## HUNTERS' TRIGGERS

Javier flexed his hands slowly and purposefully, as if he were working a pump that could flush all the tension from his system. He couldn't decide what made him more nervous: the way that Mary nonchalantly pulled the revolver from her purse, or the way that she scratched her nose with the gun's barrel.

"What's got you so worked up?" Mary asked. She looked at him intently before seeming, finally, to notice the gun.

"Oh, this? It was a gift from my father. He was worried about a country girl like me living in the city. It's not loaded, but I like to have it on me. Ever since Dad died, it's been a reminder of him. The funny thing is, when I heard the voice, I had the gun on me. I was terrified that Nick was going to see me, but then I remembered I had the gun, and I remembered my dad and how he watched over me. Then Nick overlooked me and walked right on by. Since then, I've carried it with me wherever I go. It just comforts me to have it, even though it isn't loaded."

Javier sighed. "Okay, but just don't let Victor see it. He's jumpy enough without you pointing that at him."

"I'm not going to point it at anyone. It's probably more of a danger to me than to anyone else, like those anti-gun nuts are always screaming. Dad hated those whackos. Said they were all commies. Why would they want to take my dad's guns away? He was the nicest guy you could meet."

Javier sighed again. Mary might be a bit countrified, but she was handy enough when they had to deal with people like Victor and Nick. But why, of all things, did she have to carry a gun?

Every hunter who uses a trigger does so for a reason that is always personal and, ideally, unique. Triggers are a good way to define your character and to help tie his edges into his history and outlook on life. Edges are expressions of a hunter's beliefs, as reflected by his Virtues. Triggers are the talismans, gestures or utterances that serve as physical linkages to the mental states some hunters "need" to deploy their edges. Even hunters who use no triggers do so for a reason, whether they simply never felt the need for these cues or because they see reliance on such things as a sign of weakness.

This article elaborates on and explores the concept and possibilities of triggers as elements of your character's identity. Quite often, these evocative character-building tools are overlooked by players as incidental or inconsequential to the game. On the contrary, they can make the game possible as your hunter resorts to them as a rationale or expla-

nation for how and why his edges work, and therefore for how he can pursue the hunt. Feel free to use this article as inspiration for making your character's edges a foundation of his identity as a person and one of the imbued.

Initial triggers — those gained at or shortly after the imbuing — don't follow any creed- or Virtue-specific guidelines. They tend to reflect a hunter's life before the Messengers touched him, or perhaps something positive that an individual associates with the imbuing itself. Triggers that accompany edges gained over the course of the hunt usually reflect the hunter's attitude toward the ongoing mission.

## REASONS FOR USING A TRIGGER

### DISSOCIATION

Hunters like to draw a line between themselves and the horrors they face: on one side, humanity; on the other, monstrosity. Monsters regularly break the laws of physics and routinely commit cruel and brutal acts. Some hunters need triggers to separate their edges from themselves. *It's not me doing that, they tell themselves. It's this lucky charm that I found.* Maybe your character happened to have a rabbit's foot that an old army buddy gave to him. When he first encountered a monster, he thought back to his friend and the rabbit's foot. Triggers like this are ideal choices for hunters who follow a Zeal creed. Those creeds construe monsters and their allies as the opposite of mankind, a force that can be fought brutally and destroyed but never accepted. Edges are evidence that hunters, like monsters, are different from humanity. To some hunters, any link to monsters provokes guilt by association. They use their triggers as tools to reconcile their edges with their humanity.

### FEAR

Fear provokes many actions and reactions by hunters. Triggers can reflect an imbued's fears regarding the hunt. These fears aren't limited solely to external forces such as monsters but can include fear of failure or fear of being afraid. A trigger can calm a hunter in the face of his fears. A teddy bear might remind a hunter of curling up in a warm, safe bed as a child. An award, perhaps a plaque or medal, might instill a sense of pride and confidence in a hunter. Triggers that combat fear remind an imbued person of his strengths while banishing his weaknesses. A newly married hunter might touch his wedding ring as a trigger, as it reminds him of his wife's faith in him and his desire to protect her against anything, no matter what.

### ROUTINE

Beliefs and their attendant rituals lend the comfort of routine. Whether that routine is reciting a

Hail Mary or rubbing a lucky nickel, some hunters rely on a prescribed action (or set of actions) to initiate their edges. A routine helps clear a hunter's mind and momentarily takes him away from the chaos and danger around him. It lets a hunter think clearly and relax, allowing him to calmly collect the inner strength necessary to focus his unusual capabilities. Countless people abide by some superstition-based routine or ritual in their daily lives, and hunters are no exceptions. A hunter who always carries a lucky penny or one who whispers a quick prayer before using an edge isn't necessarily doing so for any deep reasons. He might just need to stave off the jitters in the heat of the moment.

## HUNTING WITHOUT TRIGGERS

Not every hunter uses triggers. Some imbued simply lack anything meaningful to tie to their edges; some consciously reject anything that gets between them and their gifts. Just as use of a trigger should reflect on a hunter, so too should not using a trigger stem from a hunter's personality or beliefs.

### CONFIDENCE

Some hunters internalize their triggers. Their faith in the hunt and their personal beliefs alone are enough to activate edges. A hard-bitten street cop who walked his beat for years and helped turn a dilapidated slum into a prosperous neighborhood may have the inner drive needed to activate his edges without a trigger. Other hunters call upon memories to use their edges. These imbued do not need anything apart from their own psyche in the hunt. Whereas some need tokens of support in order to soothe their minds, these hunters exult in their emotional turmoil and use it in pursuing monsters. A hunter who underwent a violently traumatic imbuing might simply think about the first monster he met to trigger his edges. His trigger is his recollection, rather than a physical object. The emotional and physical response that the memory spurs in him is all he needs.

### INDEPENDENCE

Some thoughtful imbued view triggers as impediments that mire a hunter's connection to the Messengers in the realm of the mundane. Ask such hunters how they "activated" a certain power and you're as likely to hear, "I just did it" as you are, "In my mind's eye I saw that rot cut in two, and there was my cleaver." Your character draws upon his inner resolve and faith to drive his edges. Thus, using a trigger can be a reflexive attitude. While some hunters subconsciously reach for an object or memento, your hunter can instead draw upon his inner strength and sense of independence. A wide range of people could hold this belief. A highly

religious person might see a trigger as a disruptive, worldly influence that sullies the purity of his imbuing. A strongly anti-materialistic person might simply put more stock in his own courage than in any mere trinket. In some ways, such beliefs are triggers in and of themselves, though a hunter who feels this way probably never admits it. An iron-willed lawyer who clawed her way out of poverty might place such a premium on self-sufficiency that she views triggers as a crutch. She bootstrapped her way out of her old life, and she sees no reason to change her ways now.

### TYPES OF TRIGGERS

A trigger is never created in a vacuum. It should reflect a hunter's beliefs, his personal background, and the circumstances of its associated edge's manifestation. When choosing a trigger, think of these three factors and how they interact in your character's life. Not all of them bear equal weight in determining every trigger. A trigger may even contradict a character's self-image and serve as a source of shame or embarrassment. Imagine a tough-guy Avenger who must use a teddy bear to trigger his Smolder edge because he first used the power to protect his kid sister. The teddy bear is an important reminder of her, and having the bear helps spur his triggers via the emotions it inspires in him. Perhaps his sister gave him the bear as thanks for protecting her, which gives the bear an even greater symbolism for the hunter. Triggers can reflect your character's personality not only by mirroring it, but by contrasting it.

### MEMENTOS AND TRINKETS

Any item that reminds a hunter of his reasons for being involved in the hunt can serve as a trigger. Personal effects tied to an important person or event rekindle emotion and passion needed to power an edge. These mementos can take a variety of forms. A gift from a loved one, especially someone threatened by the supernatural, is a natural choice for a protective edge such as Ward or Bluster. It inspires hope and passion in a hunter, two important weapons in the war against the night. A Defender or anyone else who hunts to protect others works well with a trigger of this sort.

Alternatively, an item present at a hunter's imbuing can bring back the rage and fear of his first contact with the supernatural. This type of trigger is appropriate for a hunter who fights the supernatural because of a personal urge to eradicate it. A hunter who sees the supernatural as something that must be destroyed without exception might use a trigger that evokes fear or anger. Your character might have a memento from the site of her imbuing, such as a stone that she found at the site, or whatever she happened

to have in her hand at the time of that first encounter with the supernatural.

Another type of memento is a simple good-luck charm. Hunters, like most people, had all sorts of odd habits and beliefs before they were imbued. There's no reason that these would fade away after the change. A hunter who always rubbed his pocket watch for good luck might now do so in order to activate an edge. Superstitions are a good way to flesh out your character's pre-imbued life. Your character may have been brought up in a very superstitious family. This sort of superstition is a good way to highlight your character's social and cultural background.

Items that help create a concrete connection between an edge and the real world can also serve as triggers. A hunter might use a magnifying glass to trigger Foresee or Pinpoint. A magnifying glass is traditionally associated with knowledge and investigation, or cultural icons such as Sherlock Holmes, which the imbued may associate with his edges. A character who collects stamps might consider a magnifying glass something evocative of all the happy times that his hobby provided him. The magnifier steadies him emotionally and gives him the mental clarity he needs to use his powers.

### TOOLS AND WEAPONS

A trigger needn't be a useless knickknack. For the practical hunter, a heavy club or socket wrench might make up in utility what it lacks in emotional heft. The most obvious trigger of this type is a weapon. Even if a hunter knows that his pistol is useless against a rot, the power that a gun represents can be enough to give him the confidence to power his edges. Weapons work well for hunters who fight the supernatural despite tremendous fear, or for ones who see the supernatural as irredeemably evil. A gun boosts a hunter's confidence and supplies him with a reserve of courage. A hunter need not threaten someone with a weapon to use one as a trigger. The simple presence of one on her person can be enough to boost the hunter's confidence.

Tools, like weapons, can make a hunter feel more capable of facing the supernatural. Unlike a weapon, though, a tool doesn't necessarily inspire courage because of its nature. Instead, a tool reminds a hunter of what he does well and helps him draw confidence from past successes, somewhat like a memento. The difference is that a memento typically removes a hunter from his current state of mind and often relaxes him. A tool reminds a hunter of past achievements in his pre-imbued existence and inspires his self-confidence now. Hunters who are artists or craftspeople or who are particularly skilled at their profession might use a tool as a trigger.

**PHRASES**

Language is one of humanity's most important tools. We use it to communicate not only ideas but also emotions. Words can affect the speaker as well as his audience. An emotional hunter who doesn't need objects to spur his feelings might get more of a charge from making others react to his emotions. Aggressive imbued may shout obscenities at opponents to intimidate and frighten them. To this sort of hunter, his own feelings aren't as important to powering his edges as are the responses and emotional states of others around him. A Judge might give a short, encouraging speech or a statement of principle before using an edge, drawing upon the self-satisfaction he feels in calming and inspiring other hunters.

Prayers and mantras also make effective triggers. They convey a hunter's beliefs to others while also comforting her. Obviously, a deeply religious hunter can use prayer as a trigger, but even a hunter who has little or no interest religion may find herself turning to it. Religion offers an explanation for the hunt to many of the imbued, even ones who aren't personally religious, whereas hunters who have abandoned or ignored their faith may still cling to it in times of stress, such as when activating edges.

**ACTIONS**

Ritualized actions let a hunter assert control over himself in the face of a chaotic and dangerous world. Much like superstitions, a hunter may create his own personal justifications or explanations for whatever actions he takes to activate an edge. Some actions, such as an obscene gesture, work much like spoken phrases: They communicate to others the hunter's state of mind. Other activities have a more symbolic bent. A Martyr might practice self-mutilation to activate his edges, giving the personal sacrifice he makes in the hunt a concrete, ritualized emblem. An Avenger might adopt a fighting stance that he learned in a martial-arts class, whereas a Visionary could remove his glasses, clean them carefully and put them back on. Actions tied to edges do not have to be specific. What is more important than the act itself is the state of mind or activity it indicates.

**MATCHING TRIGGERS TO EDGES**

A hunter normally does not use the same trigger for each of his edges. Edges that fall under different Virtues probably have different triggers. A violent, aggressive edge such as Cleave is probably fueled by far different emotions and memories than an introspective, contemplative edge such as Delve. Yet, it is completely possible for a single character to possess both edges. Most hunters don't fight the supernatural for simplistic reasons that can be summarized in a



sentence or two. A hunter's triggers should make emotional sense, if only to him, with regard to his edges.

Triggers should be somewhat consistent for an individual character. A hunter who uses quiet prayer to fuel passive edges might use blasphemy or obscenities to power his more aggressive ones. Although the two types of triggers might seem to be total opposites, they both derive from the same source and reflect different sides of one character's identity. A character with triggers like that might even hate himself for his aggressive edges' triggers, but perhaps that self-hatred generates the anger needed to activate such powers. A carpenter might use a different item from her toolbox for each of her edges — a level for an edge such as Discern, a chalk marker for one such as Ravage, and so on. A character's personality and past should determine the general bent of his triggers, but the nature of his edges should have some influence on how his triggers work.

### CHANGING TRIGGERS

A hunter might become more comfortable and confident in the course of the hunt and lose all need for his triggers. A particularly important event after a hunter's imbuing might serve as a major emotional crossroad in a hunter's life, causing him to rethink his priorities, a change reflected in his triggers. A hunter who has a child might alter her triggers to reflect her pride and joy in her offspring, and also the new burden of responsibility she bears. Triggers reflect a hunter's emotions and beliefs. If either should change, then a hunter's triggers should change along with them.

### TRIGGERS AS PART OF A HUNTER'S LIFE

Some triggers are actions, phrases or tools that a hunter uses in his everyday life. For example, a hot-headed imbued may need to yell a stream of obscenities to fire himself up and activate an edge. If that hunter accidentally smashes his finger with a hammer and lets loose a string of curses, does he activate his edge? Normally, hunters must intentionally focus their will to activate an edge.

That doesn't mean triggers impact only her edges, though; they can have meaning in other parts of her life. They might remind a hunter of safety, loved ones or whatever else that inspires her, but they can also remind a hunter of the grim truths of the world when the imbued deals with these items outside the hunt. A carpenter who uses a hammer to trigger her edges might find that the hunt constantly gnaws at her on the job because the hammer serves as a constant reminder of the hunt, of monsters and of how the world really works. Such stress might cause her to give up work that she once loved.

### USING EDGES WITHOUT ACCESS TO TRIGGERS

When a hunter does not have access to a trigger, his ability to use an edge can be seriously affected. The most important thing to keep in mind is that triggers are emotional tools for hunters. They serve to focus a hunter's will and put him in the proper frame of mind to use an edge. When a hunter doesn't have access to a trigger, you may opt to increase the (or impose a) Conviction cost to activate the edge, probably by one. The next time your character uses the trigger with its edge, however, you may decrease any Conviction cost of activating it by one. The cost/reward reflects your character's growing awareness or understanding that his powers originate from him, not from some action, object or phrase. You may not bank this bonus by activating an edge without a trigger several times in order to build up several chances to activate the edge with a reduced Conviction cost. You may use this bonus only once per trigger that your character has, no matter how many edges are powered by that trigger and no matter how many times you use the edge without its trigger.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIGGERS

Triggers are meant as a tool to help define your character. They are an important link between your character's personality, his beliefs, his past and his role in the hunt. Triggers should add an extra flair to your character, the sort of detail that helps make your character more than a collection of statistics on a sheet. You have a lot of freedom in choosing triggers. Make the most of it and choose something that adds to your character. Triggers should never be hurdles that prevent you from enjoying the game. They shouldn't become burdens that prevent your character from using an edge because they're always being stolen or lost. Triggers should not be a hunter's Achilles' heel. Don't treat them like a superhero's special vulnerability that the villain trots out and abuses to keep the hero down. Triggers shouldn't occupy a big part of the game. They're window dressing. They add color to the game and to your character, but they should remain little extras.

### NORMAL PEOPLE IN AN ABNORMAL SITUATION

Colin eased himself into the cheap, Korean-made plastic chair near the back of the school auditorium. He had put on a lot of weight since the years he was here on a regular basis, about three decades ago, and the chair protested its burden with an angry creak. The room was abuzz with

proud parents, prouder grandparents and ornery siblings, all of them here to see children perform in the school's musical recital. Colin fit into the first category. Like so many other fathers here, Colin was damn near bursting with pride as he waited to see his little Kyra play her clarinet.

Oh, she wasn't very good, but what could you expect from an eight-year-old? She was having fun, which was the main thing.

Colin couldn't say the same for himself. Time and events had changed him, and he now realized something he'd never confronted before. He was like no one else in this room. He was different.

Seeing a diseased-looking stranger smash through a window and attack his editor-in-chief while screaming, "You bastards ruined my life!" hadn't been a good start to Colin's year. Knowing he recognized some of the other accusations the man had made had been bad. Realizing that they were verbatim statements from a disgraced politician — an altogether different, very bitter, very dead man that the paper had been instrumental in unseating — had been a very special kind of bad. Hearing a loud, booming voice declare "THIS RESTS IN YOUR HANDS" and watching sparks char the man's flesh when Colin dashed in to shield his boss had been downright terrifying. Altogether, quite a shitty day to kick off an even worse year.

The divorce proceedings a few months later, after Colin's wife accused him of having an affair (Colin never did work out how to explain where he went at night), were further badness. Worst of all, though, had been losing custody of Kyra. That hurt. How could he possibly protect her when he wasn't even allowed near her, except every other weekend?

And Colin did have to protect her. That became abundantly clear one day while he was trailing her after school, when some half-vampire thing leaped out of its car and tried to grab her — probably because Colin had killed the monster's boss. Colin beat the little bastard black and blue.

That had been a minor triumph. Learning that Kyra had taken cues from her father and begun punching out other children to solve her problems was not. Trying to explain, "Do as I say, not as I do" to an eight-year-old wasn't easy. And they had cut his visiting rights to once a month for violating the terms of his child-custody agreement.

Colin sighed and looked at the people sitting around him. They didn't know. None of them would want to know, even if they could. For him, they were the others' potential targets. People to be saved.

But then, a wonderful thing happened. The curtains drew back, and glorious, discordant



near-music flooded the room. Colin basked in it, as did every other adult in the room.

I'm not so different, really, Colin thought. I just do a few different things now and again.

**Hunter** is, first and foremost, a game about normal people. Everyday, see-them-on-the-street, workaday people. They are vitally important to **Hunter**'s mood and themes, which stress horror, fear and hurt above action and explosions.

Let's face it: Although a Special Forces commando or a Navy SEAL is also a real person with real emotions who probably would also feel fear and horror at being confronted by a rotting, walking corpse, there's no way that we, Jane and Joe Average gamers, could possibly portray them accurately. We'd end up portraying them as if they were in a movie, which is all wrong. **Hunter**'s horror doesn't stem from monsters and supernatural terrors (though they contribute to it). Instead, it comes from the slow, painful realization that the dreams you had are in vain, that the security of the world around you is a lie, and that you are largely helpless in the face of overwhelming, oppressive force. Commandos and Navy SEALs are people who do not have such illusions of security to begin with, and they are trained to a much higher degree of competence than average folk. Worse, they are perhaps more emotionally ready to face a hunter's task. Playing such individuals robs **Hunter** of much of its horror.

But we *should* be able to accurately portray that fellow who works behind the snack bar at the cinema. Or the young woman selling tickets. Or maybe even the manager of the cinema.

Shouldn't we?

Often, we can't, for varied and legitimate reasons. We've been conditioned by the media of comics, adventure novels and (especially) Hollywood movies to see heroes as people above the average, beyond the norm. Even so-called "everyday heroes" somehow manage to handle situations rather more handily than reason would predict. A concept like "University Student" becomes "University Student with Fencing Training and 5 Appearance," and even the guy peddling Raisinets is still able to react instantly when a gun goes off. All of these unlikelihoods are perfectly acceptable within the context of an action movie. After all, they're tailored to foster an atmosphere of excitement. Yet **Hunter**, despite all the guns, the stalking and the monsters, isn't about action, but rather horror, and such themes require more grounded characters who can generate empathy (though not necessarily sympathy) in their players.

There are other reasons that more extreme characters get created, of course. Many players attempt

to use gaming as a means of feeling powerful, as an escape from the powerlessness that we often feel in everyday life. These people rebel against portraying real emotions or desires in their characters, because showing emotion or revealing desires places your character in a vulnerable position. Other players, particularly ones whose out-of-gaming lives include a heavy interest in the supernatural or the fantastic, have difficulty trying to accurately grasp the way that someone without such interests would see the world. Indeed, imagining the view through someone else's eyes is a difficult exercise.

And contrary to what some people might expect, it is in fact more difficult, not less, to portray a normal person realistically than it is to depict an unusual or supernatural character, because the standards are naturally higher. Think about it: When was the last time you talked to a vampire? And when was the last time you talked to a real, normal person? When someone plays either of these beings, which one will you be able to look at and recognize as fake? Playing a normal person is hard.

### CREATING A NORMAL PERSON

So, how do you create a normal person? First of all, you have to understand what normal means in the **Hunter** context. As much as we like to proudly hold aloft the claim that **Hunter** is the game about "real" or "normal" people, the fact remains that real people don't hunt down and kill, or heal or pacify monsters, because, of course, monsters don't really exist.

Rather, when **Hunter** talks about real or normal people, it refers less to whether these people could actually exist, and more to a certain mindset. A soldier back from a peacekeeping mission is definitely a real person, but he doesn't fit the model of a "normal" person as far as **Hunter** is concerned. Meanwhile, there are probably fewer subsistence-level attorneys than soldiers, even in developed countries such as the United States. But a round-heeled lawyer is perfectly suited to the concept of a hunter. A big-shot attorney might not be, depending upon how he is played.

"Normal," in **Hunter**, often means "ignorant and plain." The aforementioned megabucks attorney is just as clueless — and would be as scared witless — as any of us, but he's not plain, he's glamorous. He's not part of the society that **Hunter** focuses on. Conversely, the soldier is definitely blue collar, but he defies the mood of the game by possessing the kind of knowledge and training to counter the feelings of confusion, fear and, yes, even incompetence that all hunters possess to some degree. "Normal" is therefore defined in the negative, in the sense of "not extraordinary."

## BEING NORMAL OUTSIDE THE NORM

Of course, the fact remains that a soldier or a hot-shot lawyer is a real person, with normal feelings, desires, pains and insecurities, just like us. The amount of money that governments pay members of their armed forces in mental care after major operations are testimony to the fact that even trained, armed soldiers aren't fully prepared for facing the monstrousness that lethal conflict imposes. And yes, **Hunter** could work with somewhat "less normal" characters; how horrific would it be to see a ghost possess your friend, especially given that he tends to lug around an M-16 most of the time?

The danger here is in being able to resist the urge to play these soldiers as cold, steel-nerved warriors, rather than having them react to the monsters as they most logically would: pissing their pants and panicking. **Hunter** isn't about violence and bloodshed. It's about *real, human reactions* to violence and bloodshed.

So, if you're determined to play something a little less "normal," make sure you know how.

First, do your research. Try phoning a local military base, legal office or bar association. Make clear the fact that you're researching a role, though you might wish to be vague about what the role is *for*. Head to your local library or army-navy store. Search the web for manuals, procedures and the like. Start asking every question you can possibly have about the career or lifestyle you intend to represent. Ask about what stresses and psychological frameworks people in such conditions tend to have.

Second, spend about twice as long on your character as you would any other. You're already playing someone with a different mindset than you and trying to make him or her real. That's doubly hard, so spend twice as much time. Don't just create a list of various events in your character's life, go into each and every one in detail. Ask yourself *why* each event happened, and how it affected (or changed) not just you, but other people in the event. Imagine extended discussions in your relationships with other people. List your character's favorite type of ice cream. Or why *all* ice cream makes her want to vomit.

And third, for goodness' sake, check with your Storyteller before you even start to create your character — and during character creation, if you find your initial direction changing. If he's not on your side, then you won't have fun. It's that simple. And after all, the ultimate aim here is to have fun.

Of course, the downside of being "not extraordinary" is that there's less inherent interest to the concept. Let's face it: "lawyer" offers more to conjure with than does "bricklayer," for example, and neither sounds anywhere near as sexy as "Avenger."

(Which, by the way, is the out-and-out *last* thing you should conceive your character as. Never, ever make a "creed clone." Nothing makes a character less interesting than basing it on any kind of archetypal gaming role. Furthermore, anything explicitly to do with hunting monsters does not belong in your character creation process, because it's the very tension of someone who *wasn't* suited for doing so that makes **Hunter** work.)

To some degree, this salutary self-limitation makes finding movies and books for inspiration for imbued characters a real pain. Not many movies out there are about clueless, scared, ordinary people fighting monsters. You can take a few detours in your local video store, of course. Films such as *American Beauty* or television shows such as *Roseanne* are all about normal people. *American Splendor* is a great comic about average American families. From there, take one of the characters and slowly drag him into the **Hunter** setting. Was Lester Burnham's breakdown due solely to work stress and being underappreciated by his family? Or was there another, *darker* reason?

But there's a better alternative to that, as well. Here's how it works.

Put down the remote. Walk out the door. Proceed via the most convenient method of transportation to the nearest shopping mall, bar or wherever else people congregate. Start taking notes. Using public transportation to reach your destination is ideal, because it's inherently nonglamorous in itself, and you can take notes on the way. Start with the bus driver.

The point here is that only good, solid observation of real people helps you create good, solid real people. All that movies and books can help you create are characters who belong in a movie or a book, so stick to observations of real people, instead. If you know people who fit the mold of someone you'd likely see at the mall, and you know them well, feel free to use them as inspiration.

Here are a few things to look for when taking notes.

- **Physical Appearance:** And we mean more than just "brown eyes, blond hair." What style is that hair? Is a person tall or short? Fat or thin? Is he bow-legged, pigeon-toed or neither? Does she have any unusual features such as a tattoo or a scar? If so, does she attempt to hide it, and how?

- **Physical Movement:** How does she walk?

Watch for the way someone “leads” with her motion. What is the first part of her body that seems to move? Energy seems to come from one part of a person’s body when she walks, and that influences her overall appearance. Does she lead with her nose, making her whole body seem light as if she were floating? Or does she have energy in her hips, giving her solidity and hard, heavy motions? Someone who leads with her back or bottom looks as if she’s pushing herself forward. Also, watch for how people’s hands, arms and heads move. Does she wave her limbs as if she were swimming upright through the air, or does she bob them in a more mechanical sort of locomotion? Does she push them out from her body, making herself look bigger, or is the reverse true? What does she do with her head? Does she move it from side to side, stare straight ahead or nod as if agreeing with herself?

Also, think about how you recognize people you know when you see them initially from behind. Hair and movement are central to such identification.

• **Vocal Characteristics and Quirks:** If you get the chance to listen to someone speak, great! Choose one of the people in a conversation (trust us, you won’t manage to keep notes on others) and listen for repeated phrases, such as, “It’s like...” or “So, anyway...” or even more distinctive pet phrases. Listen to the actual tone of the person. Is it light and lilting or heavy and guttural? Does he have an accent? Does she talk a little bit too loudly, or is she very soft-spoken?

• **Clothing:** Most people choose their clothes not only in accordance with their physical appearance but also their personality. Is his clothing baggy and loose? Is hers tight and skimpy? Does he favor bright and outgoing colors, darker and gloomier attire, or sedate clothes that blend into a scene? Are there any pictures or logos on her clothing? If so, what do they read or depict, and what do you think they reflect about the person’s interests or beliefs?

By now, “Why?” may be running through your head. After all, your Storyteller isn’t going to ask you to show up in costume, and you certainly won’t be asked to demonstrate your character’s walk!

The answer is immersion in the game. If you can imagine your character’s every physical quirk, vocal mannerism, choice of clothing and hairstyle, and can keep them in mind the whole time, you’re sure to have a firm grip on what your character is likely to do next. You can begin to see not only what your character will do, but the far more important side of the equation: why and how he would do it. A player who immerses herself fully

into the experience often describes her character’s action, then stops and asks the Storyteller to change her action — not because she realizes her action was foolish (indeed, such players sometimes ask the Storyteller to change an action to something that is foolish), but because she visualizes her character doing what was described and recognizes it as stunningly out of character. As you begin to work yourself into character, actions eventually stop becoming integrated into a character and begin to flow from the character, creating a full, more human and “real” experience for all.

### PLAYING A REAL PERSON AND A HUNTER

You may have noticed that, apart from one short side note, not a single part of this article has focused in the slightest upon creating a hunter, only on creating a real person. This avoidance is deliberate, because it’s not in the character generation that a hunter is made, but rather in the prelude.

What is a prelude? We know that it’s a short, usually free-form game played before the true start of a chronicle. Often featuring one player and the Storyteller, it’s a personal game designed as practice in which mistakes can be corrected and characterization improved.

But the other important point is that, in almost every case, a prelude is about a life-defining moment. For most people, the prelude is what covers their imbuing. Even if it doesn’t, odds are that it fleshes out the people who are most important to your character, and might even include a tragic or wonderful twist. Of course, a good Storyteller has a reason for doing things this way. She attempts to build drama, paranoia and every other mood and motivation she intends to emphasize in her chronicle. In *Hunter*, it’s also likely she fosters ignorance and fear, as well.

Altogether, a prelude is a fearful, tragic, human game that emphasizes roleplaying and encourages players to improve their characterization. It’s an ideal game of *Hunter*. And although the Storyteller eventually has to move past the safety of the prelude into the chronicle, players needn’t ever mentally “leave” the prelude.

Work hard in the prelude. Play out all discussion and conversations. Don’t ask the Storyteller what your player should do, just leap in and do it! Doing so helps you gain a firm understanding of your character that is useful in any game and damned essential to playing the kind of person *Hunter* suggests. Once you have that understanding, don’t be content to leave it there. Come to each game with the attitude that you are going to further develop your character, to make him more

complex, to flesh out his relationships and add new dimensions to his personality.

The end result? An incredibly well-drawn character. This kind of attitude is useful in any roleplaying game. It helps build fundamentally interesting characters. But the secondary result of this process is interesting to us as **Hunter** players, in particular. By increasing your personal interest in one of the chosen, the game's metaconcepts fall away. Bob the Avenger slowly becomes just Bob as we learn about his personal love for the Cleveland Indians, Sam Adams Cream Stout and stir-fry food. The fact that Bob can slug a monster with a smoldering baseball bat becomes far less important than the fact that Bob used to be on his elementary school softball team as a designated hitter, but he played only a single game despite years of warming the bench. Show these interests in the course of your character's discussions. When he talks strategy on how to raid a monster's hideout, have him discuss it in baseball terms: "It's the classic squeeze play, isn't it? We force their attention out front by making a lot of noise while Jim slips around the side and gets in."

## THE PROBLEM WITH EDGES

Of course, the fact remains that Bob can slug a monster with a smoldering baseball bat. That's Cleave in action. Surely, normal people can't do that!

Well, no. But normal people don't do anything with monsters (because such creatures don't exist), so if you can suspend your disbelief that far, you can probably digest normal people with edges, as well.

The real problem that many players have with edges is not that they're abnormal, but that hunters' possession of them blurs the line between imbued and monster. The game is, after all, about *humans* who hunt supernatural creatures, not supernatural creatures who hunt *other* supernatural creatures.

For some games and characters, this ambiguity isn't a problem. The Martyr creed specifically tends to focus on how blurry the line is. As stated in the main book, "We are the damned who hunt the damned." Many hunters can't help interpreting tales of vampires and werewolves as normal people who are changed into something else. Should you choose to play with this approach, and have fun doing it, then by all means continue to do so. Most games do place monsters in antagonist roles, though, and some discussion with the Storyteller is usually needed here.

So, let's examine edges and see how to portray them in a light that does not invalidate the concept of "normal."

First, an edge is unique among the Storyteller games in that it is a power whose source is located away

from the protagonist. Vampires, werewolves, mages and so on are firmly in control of their own abilities, which are the results of practice, teaching and inherent power. Such is not the case with the imbued. Hunters literally "happen" to do something they never knew they could. When they try to practice it, they find they don't get any better at it. You can't swing a "Cleaved" baseball bat any harder with years of practice than you can at the first moment you receive it.

Similarly, edges are not extensions of a hunter's own cognition. Because edges have their origin in an outside source, they can easily be misused. Even the most hardened, experienced hunter has learned to her dismay that trying to use Insinuate on the policeman arresting her is doomed to failure.

These facts are highly important, because they emphasize one of the key points in our definition of normal: ignorance. Never forget that hunters are as scared and puzzled by edges and the Messengers as they are by monsters — perhaps even more so. At least monsters are firmly the other or the enemy. But the Messengers are allies... aren't they?

As for edges, if you grabbed a baseball bat and proceeded to bash in a zombie's head in a way you never knew you could, what would you do? Hit it again and spew four-letter-words like a televised wrestler? No. You'd probably drop the bat and scream, wondering what the hell did that. And even after the first time, the conditions of how it works are so vague that edges still shock and frighten you when they do work. Edges are not an integrated part of your character (although they do express themselves in terms of his personality), but they are one of the means by which your normal person is touched by the other-than-normal.

Second, edges can be and are often best understated. Many of the edges in **Hunter** can look different depending on who uses them. Cleave, for example, can be a flaming sword, but it can also be just one almighty wallop with a handbag. The former portrayal works well in a more epic or mythic game but it's all kinds of wrong for a gritty, personal one.

Also, remember triggers. Too many people ignore this elaboration on edges. An edge such as Foresee is incredible on its own. The Visionary gets a glimpse into the future, seeing what may come to pass! But the edge becomes far less incredible if she prays for guidance and acts with some sense of assurance in what she does next. Played with an appropriate trigger, the edge not only becomes somewhat plain — more a part of our definition of normal — but it also reveals something about the character rather than just seeming like an afterthought.

Always remember the most important part of working through and on a normal person: Keep a solid and detailed foundation. Understand who your character is on a personal, mundane, normal level, and then work all else into that, such as edges and the hunt. As long as you take the time to do so, your character will be, first and foremost, a normal person.

## MAINTAINING YOUR CHARACTER

Of course, keeping a character a normal person at first is easy. You've come to the table full of zest, eager to pounce on a new game and make it crackle with the energy that any good game generates. But the games keep going, and after a month of weekly sessions, you may feel a bit tired. You still enjoy the game, but the initial buzz that drives you early on wears off in time. What's needed is a system to keep that enthusiasm alive and your characterization accurate.

Thankfully, roleplaying has a close cousin that can be rifled for ideas: acting. Actors of all stripes suffer much the same dilemma. The first or second performance of any play is often the best; the actors come on stage still full of enthusiasm for the project and ready to knock the socks off the audience. But energy begins to wane even by the third performance. To compensate, actors use various techniques, tricks and games to keep their heads together and make each performance exact and entertaining. The most well-known system for doing so is known as *method acting*.

Method acting sounds intimidating, but it's really just a set of exercises and procedures for attempting to produce realistic emotions on stage by drawing upon actors' own feelings. Some exercises are performed prior to a performance, others during a performance, and a few others afterward. Here are a few to try.

### THE LEBAN MOVEMENTS

Running through the Leban movements is a useful activity to try before a game, especially if your Storyteller agrees to help out. Make sure everyone does them, so you feel a little less silly. The Leban movements are a series of eight separate motions that represent a good cross-section of emotions. Each motion is either strong or weak; and sudden, sustained or traveling. The motions are:

- **The Punch.** Drive your fist forward and bring it back. The Punch is strong and sudden. It represents aggression, violence and sudden bursts of anger or passion. Do not aim punches at other players or the Storyteller. No matter what anyone did to your character last session.

- **The Slash.** Using the elbow and shoulder, swing your arm forcibly through the air from one side to

another. The Slash is also strong and sudden, but is far less controlled and straight than the Punch, and this is true of what it represents. Whereas the Punch represents aggression, the Slash shows you as angry and unstable, and it is often used to paint a character as slightly (or very) out of control.

- **The Flick.** A quick toss of the hand, arm, leg or head. The Flick is weak but sudden. It represents dismissal, surprise and resignation.

- **The Dab.** Bring your hand up, keeping your wrist limp, and thrust your fingers forward with your wrist. The Dab is weak and sudden like the Flick but is a straighter motion, more like the Punch. The Dab shows you as nitpicking and pedantic. It's a very nagging gesture. Use it to show condescension, disgust or weak defiance. If it's done quickly and repeatedly, it can show excitement.

- **The Press.** Bring the hands or a knee (not both at once, obviously) up to the chest and slowly but firmly push the hands or foot away from you. The Press is strong and sustained. It represents determination, seething anger or fury, and grace under pressure.

- **The Wring.** Pretend you have a piece of fabric in your hands, and slowly turn your wrists in opposite directions. The Wring is weak and sustained. It represents angst, worry, fear and nervousness.

- **The Glide.** Walk across the room, taking long, confident, graceful steps. The Glide is strong and you travel with the motion. The Glide represents arrogance, composure, elegance and control.

- **The Float.** Lean back a little and take quick, tripping steps across the room, bouncing a little. The Float is weak and you travel with the motion. The Float represents ecstasy, dreaminess and joy.

Before a game, run through the motions. Stand up. Leave the table. Find a place with room to move. Ask your Storyteller to call out a motion by name, which you should then act out. If he says "Punch," make a few short, quick jabs. After performing this motion, begin to attach an appropriate emotion to the action, and try to feel that emotion as you move. Then, slowly begin to imagine how your character would move when experiencing this emotion. Is your character short and very aware of it? Have him punch upward, unleashing pent-up rage. Insecure and unwilling to show emotion? Make the punches distinct and separate, artificially calculated while still angry. Then, move on to the next one your Storyteller calls out. Run through all the motions two or three times.

And, yes, you will look silly doing them. So? Everyone else will look just as silly, and let's not forget: You're already pretending to be monster hunters. If you can do that, you can look like a goof for a few minutes

and not be ashamed. Trust us, and do this exercise honestly. It helps you play out the emotions of a game beforehand, and gives you a better image of how your character looks throughout the game. Keep these images in mind, and then tie them in to your character research. Just how does a normal person use the basic movements in their everyday life? Create the image of your character with the Leban movements, then hold that image throughout the game.

#### EMOTIONAL RECALL AND FOOTNOTING

One of the most common method techniques is emotional footnoting. In traditional performance, a method actor goes over his script in minute detail and scribbles in the margins every emotion his character is feeling at every line. After doing so, he not only memorizes the lines but also the emotions. Finally, to complete the footnoting, he connects each emotional footnote to a situation in his life and tries to find a close analog to every scenario in which his character finds himself. When he goes on stage, he mentally relives those moments while having memorized the lines well enough not to have to worry about them. The result is a highly emotional, very believable performance.

While this end is exactly what we're after, we have a problem translating this technique over to roleplaying, because we don't have a script. We do have a number of pertinent constants in any *Hunter* chronicle, however.

First of all, we know it's going to be about horror. We also on firm ground if we expect violence will be involved, or at the least hostile confrontation. Talk to your Storyteller beforehand to learn what other emotions will be involved (and which he doesn't mind telling you will be). Sometimes, you'll be able to guess. If the walking dead are involved, expect emotions of creeping fear and desperation. If vampires are, expect emotions such as violation and paranoia. Or if ghosts are, look for emotions such as nostalgia or regret.

Then, recall experiences of your own that evoked such feelings in you. Remember what it felt like to believe you were being followed? Or when burglars broke into your home? Or the first time you ever saw snow? Or what it was like to change a tire alone at night in the middle of nowhere? Write down these moments in as much detail as you possibly can. Go over the notes. Relive these moments and memorize them.

Then, during the game, look for situations that loosely (or even closely) match your own. At this point, recall the actual moment and try to revive the emotions you were feeling then. Your character becomes more realistic, emotionally and dramatically. The technique is a demanding one to pull off well, but keep practicing and you'll get better and better — and so will your games.

#### IN-CHARACTER DIARY

One of the simpler techniques of method acting is simply staying in character. Some actors are known to spend much time actually living as their character in some way, shape or form. Others spend time writing letters or correspondence in the voice of a character in order to perfect it. Roleplayers have a perfect vehicle for such exploration: the in-character diary.

An in-character diary is as simple as it seems. After every session (or, perhaps, after each day of plot if your sessions are intense enough to cover only part of a day), take the time to write down a diary entry in your character's voice. If you don't feel your character would be the type to write a diary, consider other modes. Perhaps he regularly posts messages to hunter-net about his experiences? Maybe he speaks into a portable recorder of some kind?

No matter what form it takes, the purpose of this exercise is straightforward. First of all, doing so helps you perfect your character's "voice," the tone of discussion she uses, the expressions she's fond of, her vocal

#### A NOTE ON SAFE WORDS

Each of these techniques has been described with a common goal: to make your playing better and to make the game better. And making the game better has been defined throughout this essay as "more emotional, normal and realistic." And in *Hunter*, that is indeed often what makes a "great game." *Hunter* is all about human emotion and psychological horror, and realistic performances help it immensely.

But the fact is, what makes a good game is simply that everyone has fun. Sure, fun doesn't always mean comfortable, but playing should never be a chore. Worse, it should never be a nightmare. And method acting, especially emotional footnoting, is all about bringing forth real-life emotions and reliving them. Sometimes, it can be downright unpleasant. Other times, it can be unbearable.

As a result, when using these techniques, always, *always* make sure you have some sort of "safe word" ready. Have a word like "aardvark," or some other word that's not likely to be used, and when someone says it, play stops. Immediately. Take the time to talk to the Storyteller (or, if you can't, another player you trust) and discuss why you can't keep playing in a particular scenario. Then, only once it's been worked out, return to the game. Trust us, everyone will appreciate this release valve.

peculiarities. In addition, the diary acts as a window into the character's mind. By formally setting down the character's opinions and beliefs, you can take the time to see how she evolves over time. Pay attention to her beliefs about other characters and about herself. Retell the events of the game session from your character's perspective.

This activity even has a mechanical benefit. By tracking your character's development, you can quickly observe where experience points ought to be spent. In addition, showing that your character has learned something becomes much easier. But more importantly, the diary serves as a roleplaying aid. Often, you will discover your character's opinions change in ways you might not have observed otherwise. Other times, it simply serves as practice for the next session, to reinforce your characterization. Either way, it makes your playing, and the game, better.

### BUT WHY?

Of course, in-character diaries take time, and emotional recall takes a lot of effort. The Leban movements will, we personally guarantee you, make you feel silly the first time you do them.

So why bother?

Because **Hunter**, probably more so than any other game set in the World of Darkness, requires you to understand the motivations and emotions of your character in a sense that is human, believable and, above all, real. The game requires you to show your character as a normal person, in all his complexity.

And perhaps most importantly, **Hunter** requires you to portray your character in a way that is true to the person's emotions, not just his intellect. This game isn't one in which you weigh personal risks and gains clinically. **Hunter** is a game in which you sacrifice yourself to save your daughter from the threats surrounding her, because the terror you feel in your gut numbs you to your own danger. Or do you feel the cold grip of fear in your legs and watch in helpless horror as she's dragged into the shadows?

Those questions are what method-acting techniques are all about: questions of how normal people act and react.

## THE HUNTER'S LIFE

*It was already 8 o'clock at night. I was waiting impatiently in the living room when Molly finally came out of her bedroom. She had "Little Boy" in one hand. She dragged the cast-off backpack her brother Darryl had given her in the other. The bag was a peace offering in exchange for the Tonka truck he'd usurped after her*

*birthday party last Saturday. The bag was stuffed with some clothes and other toys. I couldn't remember why I'd been so pissed when Darryl weaseled the truck out of her. She liked the goddamn backpack better.*

*No, I take that back. I knew why I was mad. She'd begged for the truck and I had worked a double shift to get it. And yet, that all seemed so unimportant now. All that mattered now was getting her somewhere safe, somewhere away from me, somewhere away from the thing I knew was looking for me.*

*"Mommy, where are we goin'?"*

*I dodged her question. "You're going on a little trip, bug. You get Little Boy all dressed and ready to go?"*

*She pursed her small pink mouth and looked up, the question still hanging in her wide gray eyes. "Mommy! Li'l Boy is big now. He can put his pants on hisself. Why are we goin' away? I want to go to bed and watch cartoons on the V-TV!"*

*Cartoons — the same ones over and over — were an obsession. "V-TV" meant "VCR," and "Li'l Boy" couldn't dress himself to save his life. His pink polyester ass was still bare. I didn't realize I was smiling until a few minutes had passed, when I noticed how odd it felt. I hadn't smiled in days — since I'd seen it.*

*Molly's voice had that little-girl whine that was usually assuaged by sugary cereal or more cartoons. If only those were the only problems I had to deal with... but I had to get her out of there while I still could.*

*"Bug, if you're good, I'll let you watch cartoons when we get to Daddy's." Now, come on.*

*"We goin' to Daddy's? Yaaay!" She started running in circles, looking for her shoes. Finding them under the coffee table, she plopped in the middle of the floor and pushed her small feet into them.*

*Storm over. Blue cloudless sky on the horizon. Life is so simple when you're four, although it took my full concentration to say "four-year-old." It took focus and time I didn't have.*

*If we didn't get out of the house right away, we might never get out.*

Your life has been turned upside-down. You know that there are things out there, things that threaten you daily. But, they don't just threaten you. They threaten your family, your friends, your safety, your livelihood, your hopes, your dreams and your ambitions. They threaten all of humanity, and it's suddenly become your job to do something about them. Yes, you've been changed. Yes, you've been given tools, no matter how insignificant they seem, to deal with the creatures that appear to elude notice by the rest of the human world.

But how much of your life must change? How much of it can you salvage? What do you have to give up? Can you maintain any sort of normality in

your day-to-day dealings? Can you still go on living as you did before? Can you get married, stay married, have children or maintain a steady relationship with the ones you've already brought into the world? Can you keep your job? Can you keep on *living* rather than just existing?

These questions have no set answers. As is true of everything we deal with as real people with real problems, it all depends on the individual and the situation. One thing is certain, however: Maintaining any sort of normal life after being imbued requires infinite flexibility and commitment. Perhaps that's really the key, because in real life our families and friends help keep us grounded and happy. Our jobs, hobbies and activities help keep us fulfilled. Now, imagine a life that denies you all of those privileges.

Pretend that some epiphany strikes and changes — or at least colors — everything you know about yourself and the world. Human beings are creatures of habit, of security. We don't usually adapt well to radical alterations in our routines. If the things we take for granted, such as eating dinner, are suddenly made difficult, almost impossible to maintain regularly, wouldn't we be scared, angry and resentful?

Hunters face many choices after they're touched, choices that threaten to shatter every bit of conventionality and safety they've ever known. Perhaps their greatest and most difficult decision is whether to try to preserve their day-to-day lives or chuck the past altogether and start again, throwing themselves wholly into the hunt. What challenges would a hunter encounter with either choice? What problems would she face and could they be surmounted?

This article explores the trials of holding onto life as hunters know it and pursuing the mission, or turning their backs on the world and people they've known to dedicate themselves completely to the calling. Either course is a lesson in exploring the humanity of the imbued — and of your character.

### LIVING A DUAL LIFE

So you're a hunter who can't bring herself to let go of her life thus far, even with the knowledge that monsters exist and all people are in jeopardy at all times? You can't bring yourself to forego your loved ones, dreams or plans for the future even when the truth has stood rotting before you, and everything you took for granted before is suddenly suspect? You don't want to turn on your old life so decisively that you have no personal reason to go on? Well then, you have some decisions, sacrifices and compromises to make if your new and old lives are going to reach any kind of harmony — if that can ever be achieved in a world of darkness.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

It sounds cliché, but "time management" is the best way to sum up reconciling old and new lives. There are only 24 hours in a day. Before your imbuing, you probably had numerous responsibilities. Your kids, spouse and job all demanded your attention. As you hope not to lose any of those elements of your past, you now have to juggle all of your previous activities with a responsibility that dwarfs any single person or occupation. And there's little room for failure, because a mistake could mean losing your family's trust, your supervisor's confidence, or your life. What does everything you hoped to hold onto amount to then?

### FAMILY AND FRIENDS

It's pretty straightforward. If you're going to salvage any part of your old life, you have to stay involved in the lives of those close to you. You have to make an effort to find small amounts of quality time whenever possible. It's like having the most demanding job you could possibly imagine, and then having a circle of people who all want a piece of you. You may have heard of the 14-7 work week. Hunters live it 24-7. You have to make incredible effort to communicate with your family and friends, to make sure they know they matter to you. There will be missed opportunities, missed "Kodak moments" and missed times of closeness. And failing to participate in those moments will engender a certain amount of resentment. Kids will be upset that you weren't at a play. Lovers will be frustrated when you stand them up. But if you communicate with them, let them know they still matter to you, you'll at least have the opportunity to "make it better." You have to prioritize personal activities with the demands of meeting and facing monsters.

How do you justify yourself to friends and family? Could you explain it even if you tried? They'd think you were nuts if you told the truth, and they can't be made to see and comprehend monsters. It would be necessary to come up with plausible half-truths about what you were doing and why you were doing it. It would help if you were able to couch it in a way that brought home how important loved ones' activities were to you, without telling the truth. Maybe family or friends could even be unwittingly involved in the hunt, and thus be party to your activities.

Suppose you rescue a vagrant from vampires and don't want just to turn your back on him for fear that he'll be a victim again. Your son is a really good student. Your wife is a social worker. The vagrant can't read, can't get a job and has nowhere to live. You try to solve the problem by helping the man get a basic education from your son, and have your wife help out

through social services. Maybe a friend owns a business and can offer the man a job once he's on his feet. Now, that one-time homeless person is more capable of fending for himself instead of being a meal on a plate, and your family and friends have worked with you to make it happen, never learning the true motive behind your philanthropy.

It's a simplistic example, and a hunter's life is never simple, but it demonstrates that your former life and new calling can be made to coincide for the benefit of both.

But then, there's always the chance that it could all blow up in your face, too. Your family could fall apart. You could get divorced. Your kids could end up hating you and start calling your spouse's new mate Mommy or Daddy. And you could lose all your friends because you've ignored them. It's all a matter of how you make time for everyone — and the hunt.

#### STAYING EMPLOYED

Money is good. People need it to live — not just well, but at all. Luxury items aside, money buys groceries, provides housing and pays medical bills — important when you run a daily risk of severe injury. Screw stock portfolios. Most people are glad to afford a warm, dry place, and hunters are "most people." But as a hunter who dedicates time to investigating and stalking creatures day and night, how do you maintain your job and keep that roof over your head? How do you feed your family and watch the shadows around the clock?

Keeping a job essentially means maintaining a schedule that allows you to do your job sufficiently.

#### DRAMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

A quick note here on focusing employment opportunities on the blue-collar: *Hunter* is largely dedicated to common people as characters. To capture this spirit of the game, try creating characters who had workaday, even manual-labor jobs *before*. These people know what hard work is and value what they have to give up when the hunt calls. It's not impossible for some rich dilettante to be imbued. Being rich presents its own problems to the chosen, such as visibility, fame and the demands of managing a fortune. And some rich folk might put in long hours to keep their fortunes and to make more. But how many really value hard work or even the small things that it can afford? Who has more to lose on the hunt, the working stiff or the business magnate?

That, in turn, means getting sufficient sleep. But monsters appear to roam day and night, when you need to sleep and when you're expected to be at work. Sure, you can occasionally stay active for long bouts, surviving on adrenaline, fear, ambition, caffeine or controlled substances. But you can't do it for long before something has to give.

Perhaps the most logical way to navigate around your job and calling is to find a way to marry the two. No, this doesn't mean becoming the owner of an occult shop, selling bogus tomes, spell components and weird pieces of art. How often does *that* happen in real life? It means is finding an occupation that doesn't stymie hunting activities, and vice versa. Many people change jobs, either out of want for something different or out of necessity. A desk-monkey who's sick of the 9 to 5 may chuck it all for a job with more freedom. A person with a sick parent may change jobs to move closer to and care for that loved one. You have your own unique needs.

Essentially, you need to ask yourself *when, how much and what*. When asks, "What's the optimal occupation that will allow me to work when I can? *How much* is a compromise that determines, "If I have to work during the day, can I pick an occupation that involves a limited time commitment, so I can get needed sleep?" What is obvious. "What kind of job fits these parameters?"

It's probably easiest to be self-employed. You don't have to punch a time-clock or explain your comings and goings. Sure, anyone who runs a personal business has to be committed to it, but your commitment is to holding on to your past life. If being self-employed makes that possible, it's worth any price. Examples of viable self-employment are countless, from blue-collar enterprises such as garages and body shops to Internet start-up companies.

Owning a business takes venture capital and good credit, however, both of which may be excluded as options. So, you might look for a more traditional job that allows you to continue the hunt while fulfilling your vocation. Becoming a cop, paramedic or firefighter? Those positions would put you on the street, whether day or night, but you need to pass tests, undergo training and possess certain skills. Becoming a wrecker driver has promise. You have access to a powerful vehicle and you're expected to be mobile, but the dispatcher might call upon you at the worst of times. Being a security guard offers work at all hours, involves a lot of on-the-job downtime, and you could be on patrol in- or outdoors — but your turf extends only so far. Taking up journalism justifies gathering information and pursuing stories, explains

constant access to the Internet, and you don't necessarily even have to show up at an office. The trick of keeping a coincidental job on the hunt is explaining seemingly inappropriate or outrageous behavior in terms of your career.

Yet another option of maintaining an income and performing the mission is to find a job that involves a set and limited time commitment. College professors don't work that many hours during the day, and they're usually off three months each year unless they teach summer school. Not only that, research sabbaticals are relatively easy to obtain and *expected* at large universities. A general-practice attorney processes paperwork — wills, contracts — that can be completed anywhere. Your employees can handle court filings and law is lucrative because services are expensive.

Even if your job demands that you be in one place for a specified time, whether day or night, your hunt may not be hamstrung completely. Internet access is increasingly important to professions. Your machine can be used to relay information to contacts, and you might even steal time to search for information or participate in chat lists such as hunter-net. As long as you manage to hit deadlines, no one is likely to look over your shoulder to make sure you use your time in the office to its fullest.

Your job might also offer some unique access, to laboratories, libraries or academia for example. A nurse has limited access to medical equipment. Maybe she could use it to "check specimens" she finds without engendering too much notice or suspicion. A hunter working at a university library could search the stacks for clues and research artifacts. A coroner or assistant coroner could perform autopsies to study victims of the supernatural — or even bodies active beyond the grave. Some jobs' access makes it possible to get needed tools or equipment, such as medical supplies, metal-working gear and maybe even weapons or illicit drugs. Just don't get caught "borrowing" them, or the resource train will come to a dead halt.

These are all simply examples, but they give you the idea. If you want to hang onto some semblance of a normal life, and intend to fulfill an imperative to respond to the supernatural, you need an occupation that coincides with and supports all your needs. After all, bloodsuckers, ghosts, wolf-men and wizards don't care if you have to be at work. They'll strike regardless of your schedule, and who else will stop them if you're not there?

#### DECISIONS

You see monsters hiding amid crowds. On the streets. At work. You know you have to do something



about them, because no one else can. But you can't just dismiss everything that's led up to who and what you've become, even if it's all a lie. What priorities do you have to change? Which ones will be changed for you? That's simple: All of them. Here's a short list of ways in which life as you know — and try to preserve it — can change after the imbuing.

Who's going to manage all of life's mundane chores now that you don't have time for such "minor" details? Who's going to pay your mortgage? Who's going to keep track of the bills, keep you from getting evicted or losing your house? Who's going to clean the house? Mundane, yes, but we all have to find time to do these things in normal life, let alone when we know for a fact that ghosts *haunt* houses.

Where do you live? Do you have to move? Where do you move? How do you find someplace that's safe for you and your loved ones? Or if you're single, do you have to pare down, become mobile?

Do you have to make special modifications to your residence? Do you have to invest in expensive security systems, guard dogs, safe rooms or exotic firearms? Which of these things can you do reasonably and not raise eyebrows among family and friends? What mundane items in your house can you use to protect yourself? What can you use to make weapons?

Do you get married? Can you start a loving relationship with another person and commit to her while you're so committed to something else? If you stay single, do you risk having a boyfriend or girlfriend, or do you just relieve your sexual urges with prostitutes? Do you abstain for fear of spilling too much information and for fear of engendering too much intimacy, even with someone you pay for sex?

Do you have children? If you die, who's going to take care of your kids? If you father or mother children outside of marriage, do you take responsibility for them, or does your avocation keep you from being close to them? Does it give you an excuse to abandon them?

Do you let anyone in on your secret? If so, *who*? If you take that leap, do they believe you? Will they think you're delusional? If they don't believe you, will you lose them? How can you sound out their reactions without playing your hand?

Where do you get discreet medical care? Can the doctor who patches up your wounds "from an animal attack" be trusted? Will she ask questions that you can't answer? How much of the truth can you reveal and still maintain her aid?

What sort of equipment do you need? Can you afford it without wiping out your savings and exhaust-

ing money put away for the future? Can you carry tools or weapons publicly? Will doing so bring the cops, the ATF or the FBI down on your head, subjecting you to a criminal fate that you can't justify?

Can your kids attend school? Do you have to keep moving them to keep them safe? Do you home-school your kids? Do you have the education for it? Do you send them away to private school, and can you afford it?

These are just some of the dilemmas you face when you maintain your past life and accept your new one as a hunter. It quickly becomes apparent that every decision you make, every choice with which you're presented forces the question, "Can I preserve who and what I was alongside who and what I've become?" Holding on to some sliver of normality gives you strength because it provides a foundation — some kind of footing, something to cling to and keep you sane in the face of unspeakable horror. But can normality endure when the world is proved to be everything but normal?

### ABANDONING YOUR OLD LIFE

How easy do you think it would be to just disappear and start over again? It's romantic to think that, as a person living a normal life, you could just leave it all behind one day. Think about what it would be like to leave your mail unopened, your bills unpaid, to empty your bank account, get in your car to drive off toward the horizon and a new life. Everyone has fantasized about it. When things get too routine, it's easy to wish you could throw it all away. But the real world doesn't work that way. The logistics of abandoning a previous incarnation are extremely complicated. Not to mention that abstaining from everyone and everything that you ever cared for would be emotionally devastating.

### FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Walking out of someone's life completely has immeasurable impact on that person. If you have family or friends who love and rely on you, you've made a commitment to those people — emotionally and perhaps financially. Breaking that kind of commitment is a breach of trust. If you were to chuck it all and leave, how would the people close to you live? Would they be able to shoulder the additional stresses and responsibilities that you've dumped on them? Would your disappearance allow any kind of closure? Your abandonment would cause others to doubt themselves and your love for them. Your spouse, children or parents might never be able to recover from the emotional and even physical repercussions of that kind of loss. A death in the family is difficult but can be dealt with because it encom-

passes a beginning, middle and end. There's a chance to say "goodbye." A disappearance doesn't allow that kind of resolution. There's never a goodbye, only a lingering "what if." Any feeling human being — and you feel, unless you suffer some sociopathic disorder, as a Wayward creed member might — would have at least a passing qualm about walking away without saying goodbye. How would you deal with those unresolved emotions?

To ease the blow to yourself and your loves ones, you might leave small clues about your well-being and even whereabouts, but such concessions would always put you in danger of being discovered and always tug on you to come home. Furthermore, anything you did to maintain the slightest connection to your past would put people in danger of reprisal by your enemies. You might try to do things the "decent" way by divorcing your spouse and sending child support, but that would always make you and your past traceable. Courts keep records of even noncustodial parents' whereabouts, child support is taken out of paychecks, and you need a job to make alimony and child-support payments.

Or maybe you know you must dedicate yourself to the hunt completely, but can't bring yourself to sever all ties to your old life, so you uproot the family and take them with you. Do you do them more good this way? Is bringing along civilians, who can't hope to understand your obsession, safe or wise? Consider that you put your spouse and perhaps children in the same position you're in. Your spouse won't be able to form any lasting relationships outside of your own. Your children have to go from school to school, never keeping friends, never making any real connection to their peers. Wouldn't this lifestyle foment resentment? Is it really a better solution than leaving your family cold?

Here are just a few thoughts on how to practically and emotionally deal with the problems of stringing others along while you hunt, or of turning your back on them completely.

- Send money whenever you can. Do it anonymously. It won't help emotionally with anything other than your own guilt, but it will help relieve some of the financial stress you've created.

- Try to write in an untraceable fashion. Email and the Internet are helpful, but even they're not completely anonymous.

- Contact them through an intermediary such as a trusted family friend who's sworn to secrecy. A family lawyer is excellent for this purpose. If the family doesn't have the means for such a luxury, a pastor or a counselor works, too. Such a person would have to be trusted not to give away your whereabouts. Perhaps you

could use this contact to try to make loved ones understand that they weren't the reason you left.

- Unexplained gifts on special occasions are a double-edged sword. They suggest that you might still be alive, and conjure up feelings that might have been overcome by the recipient, opening old or even healing wounds.

- Keep track of local events as best you can. Read local papers through the Internet or some other source to keep abreast of the things that might affect loved ones. If you discover events that could affect them, you might deal with them through an intermediary.

- Put someone in charge. That intermediary can help here, too. If family knows that you've sanctioned someone to help and guide them, they'll probably still hate you, but at least you know that someone you trust acts in their best interests.

- Follow the example of a military family. Military families often move around a lot. They have to be very close-knit and interdependent to survive constant relocation. Allow your family members as many emotional luxuries as possible — limited contact via letters with friends left behind, involvement on the periphery of your activities without direct understanding of them, involvement in a hobby or interest that can keep them happy.

- Loved ones have agreed to put all their trust in you and leave behind everything they hold normal and dear. Be more available to them emotionally and physically than you might need to be. It will cause you stress, but you've made the decision that they're important enough to drag along, so you owe them. Your wants and needs have to be less important than theirs. There will come a time, however, when hunting will drive a wedge of secrecy, lost time or regret between you. It will be incumbent upon you to bridge such a gap if your calling and relationships are going to persist.

#### SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Money also rears its ugly head when you throw yourself into the hunt and forego your past. It's a lot harder to make if you don't have access to the usual means such as a job.

If you run away from your previous identity, you have to quit your current job and find a new one. Your entire credit history is tied to a few strings of numbers, all of which are completely traceable. If someone wants to learn all there is to know about you, your payment history and your previous financial problems, all they need to do is punch nine numbers into a credit data base and they get a complete picture of what you did and who you were. Skeptical? Go to your insurance agent or bank and ask about Dunn and Bradstreet or TRW. These

organizations are able to find out where you've worked, how late you are on your utility payments and whether you have a criminal record — all by knowing your social security number. The wealth of information tied to those nine numbers is incredible. Such numbers are used similarly in countries other than the United States, too.

So now you can't use them. They're tied to your old existence and you've left that behind. How do you get credit to purchase even the most basic necessities of modern existence, such as a car or a place to live? All lease applications ask for credit information, after all. Where do you find money? Employers have to obtain certain information about you in order to comply with federal employment guidelines. They have to file I-9 forms that prove you're a legal citizen. They have to file W-4 forms to facilitate your taxes. Okay, so you say illegal aliens get away with it all the time. True, partially, but all these people live in *constant fear of being caught* — of being arrested, being fired and being deported. You have enough to worry about with stalking and being stalked by monsters, never mind the local police and federal agencies.

After you start again, you can apply for a federal tax identification number — the numbers assigned to businesses and the self-employed — but if you're caught using it in place of a social security number, you'll go to jail for a long time. You can buy a bogus social security number, but you better have the money on hand to get it. They start at about five grand, cash and carry. If you're caught using it, and it's likely you will be unless you know all about the government's monitoring systems, you'll go to jail for a long time — again.

If you use fake ID numbers to get credit, you probably have to use them for only a short period of time, milking them for as much cash as possible, and then skipping out on the debts that you incur. You risk revealing yourself if you actually pay bills, because you usually have to do that by some negotiable security such as a check. Money orders probably work better, but you have to pay for them in cash. So you end up robbing one credit source to pay the other.

You could take rootless, solitary jobs that pay in cash or under the table. Most of these are some form of odd job and they rarely pay enough to keep one person alive and healthy, let alone a family if you decide to uproot the brood and take them along. Perhaps you have to live a total cash existence, drifting from one odd job to another. Could you do this and maintain any semblance of a normal life?

Probably not. But after all, you've embraced the hunt completely.

Without reliable means of your own, a strict hunter might have to resort to criminal activity to stay afloat and fund his cause. Skipping out on credit and faking credit sources are felony fraud — and they're "victimless" crimes. You (and your family if they're along for the ride) might have to stoop to other felonies — armed robbery, burglary, drug dealing or possibly even prostitution. White-collar crimes such as grifting or conning people can be more lucrative, but they're hard to pull off. They usually require resources or other elaborate setups. And what if you run afoul of the law? You might skip out on arrest warrants and become wanted. Or you might just go directly to jail.

The need to make money also calls for a certain amount of visibility, something that a person who doesn't want to be found would like to avoid. Can you make money and still stay completely mobile, completely untraceable? Would you have to travel around the country in a van solving mysteries, so to speak? The need for ID alone implies the possibility of being found. The living quarters that would likely be within your means would be lamentable, due to lack of usable identification and limited funds. At the extreme, you might have to squat in abandoned or condemned buildings. Sure, there are romantic movies about people who squat in posh digs, but how often does that really happen?

#### **FAKING YOUR OWN DEATH**

So you want to "fall off the face of the earth" to fight the good fight without danger of discovery and without being a threat to your loves ones? What better way to erase yourself and start again elsewhere, unknown, than to fake your own death? It sounds like the ideal answer, but it's a messy, tangled proposition in real life, and it's not likely to succeed for long. So, what are realistic the considerations and problems you'd encounter if you decided to "end it all"?

First of all, could you do it? In terms of everything you previously held dear, faking your own death is the ultimate "Fuck you and goodbye." Yes, your death involves some sort of closure for the people who knew you — they think they know you're gone for good — but a bogus death still leaves unanswered questions. There are some loose ends, no matter how careful you are. You can't think of everything. Perhaps the CIA, the NSA and even the Federal Witness Protection program successfully "kill" people only to relocate them, but these organizations have vast resources that are probably not at your character's disposal.

Remember that Hunter is about real-world people with real-world lives. How many ex-CIA operatives with assumed identities do you think are living in your neighborhood?

Nowadays, even small-town coroners and medical examiners have access to hair, fiber and DNA analysis. They simply send samples to larger cities and wait for the results that tell them that corpse X was really person Y. You leave ambient hair and fiber samples everywhere you go. Luminesce, a chemical used in crime-scene analysis, can reveal blood traces even when an area has been cleaned and painted. The Feds caught the Unabomber by obtaining physical evidence that included a DNA sample: five-year-old saliva traces from a single stamp! What's the point here? Physical evidence will always be left behind after any endeavor, and you can't stop it. It can be minimized, but it can't be eradicated. Sooner or later, you're going to leave a trace of your not-so-dead self, even if it's mixed in with the remains of someone who's very dead yet still walks.

So, if you decided to fake your own death, could you plan and execute so thoroughly that your "death" passed all the tests, allowed your beneficiary to collect life insurance, and ensured that the kids got Social Security to go to college? Here are some details to consider.

- Make your death look ordinary. Anything that looks like foul play arouses suspicion and calls for modern forensic techniques. A good plan leaves no body, like the old "car in the lake" trick. Drowned bodies are rarely found, even when lakes or rivers are dragged. Leaving no body also means you don't have to provide one, and if you did, how would you make it look like you in all ways, down to the finest detail? Or how would you erase all identifying features of it so it could be assumed to be you?

- If your bank account changes significantly before your death, you'll arouse suspicion. The first thing to catch a detective's attention following someone's untimely passing is an inexplicable or unusual monetary transaction beforehand. Sock away and divert whatever cash you can over time, and write off whatever remains.

- You have to move away, probably to another distant state or province. How else do you keep your family from finding you? Perhaps if you lived in a city the size of New York you could lose yourself in it, but even then there's a chance that someone might spot you.

- How do you avoid being identified by elements of your "past" life that you simply can't

escape. If your living self had a criminal record, you were fingerprinted. You still have fingerprints (they're burned off or altered only in the movies). Your old self had dental records, and you still have teeth. What if you were caught in a fight with a monster that really was tooth and nail — and you lost some teeth, or you used them and left an impression in your victim? The authorities would quickly learn that you're not so dead after all. Is there anything you can do to stop your own body from betraying your scheme?

- Once you decide to fake your own death, take your time. Don't plan it and then act immediately. The preparations you need to make to take care of your loved ones and to set aside resources take time. Planning for an extended period also fills any holes in your scam. Acting quickly leaves room for all kinds of mistakes.

- Your family is still alive and you still love them, but you're "dead" now, remember? Could you pull off the ruse and then resist the temptation of checking up on them? If you were a pretty ethical person before you "died," could you turn your belief structure on its head and totally abandon your family values?

Even if you died "successfully," what would your remaining life consist of other than the hunt? Your life would become a series of moments: getting by, stalking, perhaps killing and having nothing to show for it in your own existence. Perhaps you can maintain relationships with new people you meet, but now that you've tossed everything aside, the only ones who might have any worth to you are other hunters. After all, you can't let anyone know who you were, and if regular folks get too close, they'd have a chance, however small, of tracing you back to your former existence. But then, other imbued acquaintances might be as intense about the calling as you are. After a while, nothing but monsters and the hunt would have any value to you. What foundation does your life have then? How long can you stay sane? Perhaps you'd start to make mistakes, purposefully or not. Your real death could end it all, couldn't it? Maybe you'd even start to empathize with the very beasts you were chosen to face. You might slip up and become one of them, figuratively or literally.

Where does it say that once you fake your own death, your life thereafter isn't forfeit?

### NECESSITY MAKES STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

You hunt creatures that stalk humanity. Something you can't name opened your eyes to monsters' existence, and your eyes can't be shut again. The revelation has ended life as you knew it, driven you to

terror and paranoia, and has stripped you of the luxury of trusting anyone, because anyone could secretly be one of them.

The excruciating pressures of the calling take an unbearable toll of the imbued. You see horrific sights, witness the defenseless being tortured and killed, and watch your own loved ones suffer. Sometimes the imbued must turn to someone to ease their own pain, to find some kind of release. The only people who truly understand are other hunters. Regular folks might sympathize that you're tormented by some problem they don't comprehend, but other imbued actually empathize with what you go through, because they suffer it, too.

Sympathy and empathy aren't the same, although the differences are subtle. Sympathy is an intellectual commiseration for another's suffering. The feeling isn't mutual, simply understood in theory. Empathy is compassion for others with a similar outlook or experience. Who could understand a hunter better than another one of the chosen? Who could provide the emotional support necessary to keep an imbued sane — even if only for a few days, weeks or months? When they find each other, hunters isolated from the lives and the world they used to know often turn to each other for affirmation and consolation, despite any differences in belief or motive that they might have. They need mutual support even if individual chosen still hold on to the shreds of past lives or have committed themselves completely to the calling. But in the long term, can hunters form lasting friendships or even fall in love without worrying about their mutual danger? Is turning to other hunters for confirmation and understanding ultimately destructive when the desire to protect peers interferes with conducting the hunt itself?

#### THE BENEFITS OF ALLIES

The benefits of associating with empathetic hunters are obvious. Another one of the chosen can confirm that what you've seen and done is real, that you're not mad. They can agree that the world is the hell it seems, even if that conclusion offers little solace to you. Another hunter can know your deepest fears and maybe even share your most profound triumphs. Even if another imbued has different beliefs about monsters, the Messengers and the purpose of the imbued, he can identify with what you suffer and endure on a fundamental level.

On a more tactical level, hunter peers can help you do something about monsters and the state of the world. They can help you confront or fight creatures, save the defenseless and help protect your loves ones and achievements from before. You have a companion

with a mutual cause and a common point of reference. You're not alone.

#### THE DANGERS OF ALLIES

Unfortunately, there are weaknesses in all human relationships, no matter how committed or even battle-hardened. Of course, there's the constant risk of different goals and motives clashing, even violently, perhaps turning imbued into antagonists. But the dangers of forging relationships with other imbued run deeper than that.

What if you invest too much importance or faith in a relationship? What if your need for or reliance on another hunter becomes so intense that it actually interferes with your ability to carry out the hunt? You might not dare put your ally in danger for fear of losing him, and you might hold back from risking dangers for fear that your ally might be hurt by your loss. The threat of intense hunter relations is that individuals assume more importance than the struggle itself. When all of humanity is at stake in the war against the supernatural, no objective combatant can value one person above the masses.

In the real world, some professions prohibit working with family members, loved ones or anyone who might compromise participants' performance. For example, the U.S. Armed Forces have asserted that men and women shouldn't serve in the same combat units together. Traditional thinking goes that men naturally feel protective of women and wouldn't abide women being wounded or dying without interceding and possibly compromising the mission at hand. And yet strategists claim that men can overlook male allies being hurt or killed in battle in order to achieve an intended goal. Similarly, surgeons are sometimes not allowed to operate on family members for the lack of objectivity they might have when the patient clearly cannot or should not be saved.

The danger to hunter relationships, then, is where the line is drawn between fulfilling objectives against the supernatural and finding personal fulfillment. Some kind of equilibrium must be maintained among peers so that the objects of the hunt are upheld, and that hunters work together to achieve them and support each other. If a hunter alliance turns into more of a hunter support group, whose members hide behind and hamstring each other, the monsters win by default.

#### LOSSES, SETBACKS, TRAGEDIES AND COMPROMISES

How you pursue the hunt is dependent entirely on what's important to you about your past, about the current state of reality, and about how you hope



to determine the future. Holding onto the things you valued most before, forging forward on a new beginning, or simply finding the consolation you crave are determined by your needs for and experiences in the world. Success and sanity are determined by how well you stick to your guns, both metaphorically and literally.

The following is sort of a checklist of possibilities that you might encounter on the hunt. Each can be important based on whether you hold onto or abandon the past to follow your calling. Each instance is defined as a setback, loss, tragedy or compromise, depending on the significance of the experience to your values and your hunter ideology. Use these encounters and their significance to you as a measure of where your priorities lie in relation to the mission and your own needs. Theorizing about how you would handle the various instances below, and what each would mean to you, might help you decide how you should reconcile your personal life and the hunt, or even change your current ways.

A setback is a minor defeat, but not a permanent one. You can recover from it. A loss is final. When something's gone, it's gone for good and the impact can be important to you. A tragedy is a loss so severe that it's emotionally/mentally/physically devastating. A compromise is a decision that allows you to sidestep or overcome a defeat. It might even be a mutual victory for the parties involved.

- **Status within the community.** Your life has changed for the worse. Your status likely changes with it. How can you remain in good standing with local people when you're found standing over the body of a "person" you just killed? How are people supposed to trust you when you confront "upstanding" neighbors about their nightly activities? If social standing was important to you before, how do you respond now that you've been changed?

**Setback.** You lose face when someone you previously might have been able to help now goes to someone else for aid. You suffer an emotional regret.

**Loss.** Maybe ordinary people don't look to you for support or leadership anymore because you seem less interested in ordinary affairs than you used to be. If respect was important to your self-esteem before, you feel a sense of loss.

**Tragedy.** What if you utterly fail the people who trusted you or, worse, you contribute to their harm, whether willingly or unwittingly, for their own good or completely with ill intent? Perhaps you're outcast as a result, and it's devastating to your identity. You lose their respect and trust, and your own.

**Compromise.** Perhaps you could pass the mantle of leadership onto someone else deserving, as a public display of goodwill. Or you bow out of your relations on a good note and on positive terms, leaving friends and possibly resources at your disposal.

• **Family Matters.** Family relations have been explored thoroughly at this point, but it's still worthwhile to ask yourself how'd you respond if loved ones were subjected to the vagaries of the hunt, whether through your absence or neglect or through direct harm by creatures.

**Setback.** You notice that your spouse and kids no longer include you in the kinds of decisions that make up family life. The kids run to your spouse or a neighbor with concerns or victories. What must you do to win back their trust?

**Loss.** You lose touch with your family because you just can't hold it all together.

**Tragedy.** The worst happens and you lose your spouse, lover or your whole family. Can you handle a divorce or the sheer vacancy of an empty life?

**Compromise.** You try to fit the kids and spouse in where you can, you accept divorce but battle for custody of the kids, or find odd comfort in letting them all go because you know they're better off without you.

• **Leisure Time, Security and Luxuries.** You can't just blow off hunting to go golfing. But then, if all you did was stalk, attack and kill, wouldn't you lose your mind? How can you afford to be all the people you want to be?

**Setback.** The values you upheld when the hunt began seem evasive now. You're no longer certain what you fight for. How can you find your purpose and direction again?

**Loss.** You can no longer afford the little luxuries that you used to allow yourself, whether in normal life or after the hunt began. Maybe money is too short, family or work demands more time than you can find, or the pressures of the hunt slowly consume what you once held as important. But now that you're down to the essentials of your new existence, what's left for you alone?

**Tragedy.** You suffer or instigate complete financial collapse. You must resort to eating at missions and living in homeless shelters, taking rat-hole apartments and skipping out on the rent when eviction notices are posted.

**Compromise.** You settle for having less stuff and leisure activities, or more likely just suck it up. You accept that your mission demands as much as you can give it. Or you luck into or find new sources of money and support that reinvigorate your life and efforts.

• **Faith.** If nothing else, hunting is a test of beliefs. Your perspectives on life, Creation and the world are the very foundation for how you respond to monsters and the truth. If you were a religious person, can you maintain your faith while witnessing the true atrocity of the world?

**Setback.** Constant contact with monsters chips away at your faith that there's meaning to life, and something like heaven after death. There's definitely evidence to support your newfound doubts.

**Loss.** The truth seems antithetical to many things you held as gospel before. Does that mean everything you ever believed and valued is false, a waste of time? Where do you find direction now, or do you at all?

**Tragedy.** Your values and hopes are in ruins. Nothing you once upheld can possibly stand when monsters roam the Earth. The Creator has clearly turned His back. Perhaps even death is better than this.

**Compromise.** Okay, the world is even worse off than it once seemed. But evil can't exist unless good does, and that means something worth redeeming in life — something to live for — still endures. So, salvation is possible for everyone. Maybe even for monsters.

• **Health.** You risk death every day and night — sometimes just because you're alive, it seems. Once you worried about traffic accidents and heart disease. Now you wonder what thing is going to pull you through a car windshield, and who's going to eat your heart.

**Setback.** Perhaps the stresses of the hunt actually affect you physically, with high blood pressure or fatigue. Maybe that all-night surveillance and pursuit in the rain has taken you out of the hunt with an illness.

**Loss.** Serious injury inflicted by a monster or hunt-related accident impairs your ability to continue the mission or provide for yourself or your family. Or perhaps a mundane injury or ailment makes you incapable of performing a vitally important role on the hunt.

**Tragedy.** You suffer a permanent loss such as an eye or hand, are left handicapped or paralyzed, or lose your grip on reality. How can you even go on? Are you more hindrance than help to your allies and loved ones?

**Compromise.** You agree to change roles in your group, taking up research while others go into the field. The veracity of your information saves lives. You find or dedicate the resources necessary to overcome your ailment or disability and carry on. You're hurt, but at least hurt means alive.

• **Life.** You could die on the hunt at any time. Are you emotionally and intellectually prepared for that? Do you think there's something better afterward, or are you fatalistic enough to believe that everything's going to shit anyway and it's the struggle here and now that counts?

**Setback.** You have a near-death experience, probably one that involves a fanged or clawed killer. Can you bounce back with the same vigor you had before?

**Loss.** An ally, whether a hunter, a regular person or even a creature is killed. It's a wake-up call for you. Sure, you intellectually understood that you took life into your hands every day, but now you're even closer to the edge because there's one person fewer to help you. Maybe your number is already up and you don't know it yet.

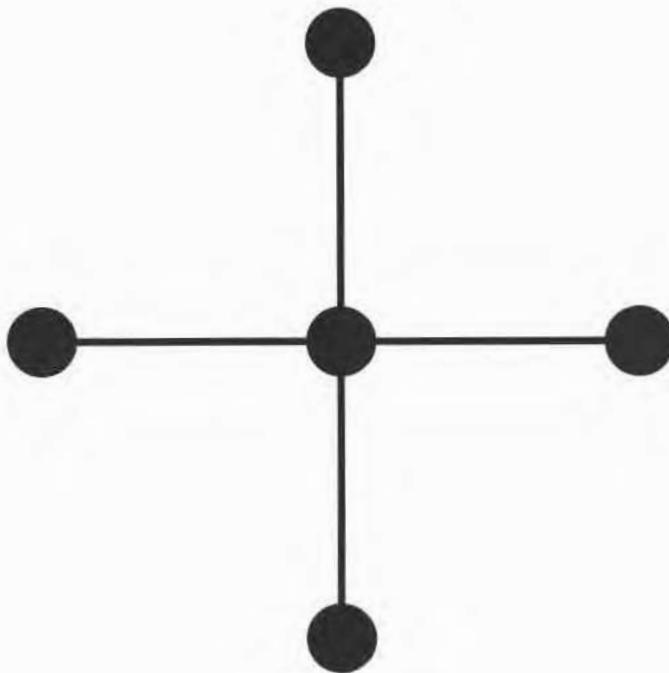
**Tragedy.** Maybe you once feared dying, but now you have a death wish. You lay your life on the line every time you face a creature, and you dare it to kill you. Sure, you might take people you care

about with you, but who cares. You'll be gone, and they'll die sooner or later anyway. The irony is, the less you care about holding on, the more scrapes you seem to survive.

**Compromise.** You accept the possibility that you could die. You still try to trust people, still try to *care* about them, and still try to resist the temptation to look over your shoulder. Somehow, you find an inner peace in all the chaos.

### WHERE DOES IT END?

It doesn't. You've been imbued. Get used to it. It all comes down to choices about what's important to you, how you make the hunt your own, and how you cope with all the victories and defeats along the way. Whether you make your past a part of your new life, or you abandon the past to embrace the new, your choice needs to give you strength on the hunt. After all, you can't ignore the call. The question is, what's the best answer for you?





# CHAPTER 5: MAKE YOUR OWN FATE

*Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

— Psalms 39:4

This chapter addresses concepts and possibilities that you and your character might explore as your chronicle unfolds. It presents articles on ways your hunter may answer the call, and how you might play the game as a result. Ultimately, all of these opportunities and options arise based on who your character is and what's important to him. His values decide whether he should hunt alone or run with allies, and how each can be managed. The challenges he faces influence how he gets by on the hunt, even when confronted by the law. And, his hopes for the mission suggest how far he might be willing to go in pursuing or perhaps making peace with the enemy.

## HUNTING ALONE

Kirsty stared into the dull, gray waters of the Clyde and wondered if tonight would be the night she'd die. For months, she'd been stalking these creatures she had "discovered," destroying them whenever she could, but she had yet to meet a single other person who would admit they existed.

She couldn't leave her country in the grip of these things, however much she might want to give up and hide from them. The voices in her head wouldn't let her. Every time she saw a monster, they screamed at her to destroy,

destroy, destroy. But how could she possibly destroy them all on her own?

One monster at a time, she thought as she noticed the sun's obscured glow just about to vanish behind the armadillo-like structure of the exhibition center. As she began to walk, she knew it was somebody's last sunset.

The drizzle became a torrent as she labored up the hill and through the central area of Glasgow toward Sauchiehall Street. She shivered as the rain plastered her hair to her scalp. She let the cold help her focus on what she had to do. She couldn't afford to think about the risks, the dangers. If this thing survived, it would continue feeding on people and that couldn't be allowed.

Soon after the sun sank below the horizon, Kirsty was loitering outside a cheap fashion shop, pretending to look at clothes her daughter would be more likely to wear. In reality, she was watching the parking lot across the street in the window's reflection. She waited for a specific car to emerge, as it had done every night for the last week. The streets were still busy after dark this time of year, and her view was partially obscured by a group of school children who huddled under umbrellas to giggle and smoke cigarettes they were too young to buy.

Then she saw it: the newish, dark green Volvo. The one whose underside carried a bomb of her making. The car paused at the end of the exit ramp as the driver waited

to turn right. One of the schoolgirls laughed and ran away waving goodbye at the others. She stopped alongside the car and waited for it to move out of her path. Damn, Kirsty thought. She offered up a little prayer to the God she no longer believed in and thumbed the switch in her pocket.

The car erupted in a ball of flame. The explosion lit up the surrounding shops. Amid the screams and panic of the shoppers, Kirsty smiled to herself. Success. For a moment, she registered that one of the schoolgirls was screaming in pain. A flicker of concern crossed Kirsty's face. Was there anything she could do without giving herself away?

And then, a different scream started. A blazing, vaguely human shape emerged from the inferno. It paused for a second. Kirsty realized it was staring straight at her. Panic gripped her. She couldn't move. Then she felt a strange sense of calm pass through her. Here it was, the moment she had been expecting since she'd first seen them.

The charnel smell of roasting flesh shocked her back into the moment. The creature dragged itself forward. It was almost on her. Moving by instinct, she reached under her coat and pulled out the meat cleaver she had stolen from a local butcher. Ignoring the pain as flames scorched at her, she swung at the burning monster. The blow caught it neatly on the neck. Its head spun away from its body. The creature stumbled forward for a second and then collapsed at her feet. The corpse sizzled slightly as the rain pelted down.

Quickly, Kirsty pulled off her coat and stuffed it with the cleaver into her bag. Then she darted onto one of the side streets leading to the office district. A sense of utter relief rushed through her body. She had survived. Again. She could hide out in one of those trendy new bars until the police were done.

How much longer can I do this? she asked herself. How much longer before they get me and no one knows to take my place?

### WHY HUNT ALONE?

Why on earth would you want to play a lone hunter? The odds are really stacked against such a character: a lone human, possessed of powers she doesn't understand, up against monsters only she can see. Each day is a battle for survival. Each victory against the other side makes your character question her sanity just a little more. Is what she's doing really right, or has she simply become a paranoid schizophrenic?

No one is around to comfort her, to back her up, to tell her what she's doing is right. She has no one to bounce ideas off or to share intelligence with. If something goes wrong, your character has no one else to haul her ass out of the fire.

So, why play the game that way? Simple. Hunting alone strikes at the very heart of *Hunter*: the terror of discovering that the world is a far darker place than you



ever imagined. Modern society has cocooned us in the illusion that we are largely safe as we hide inside our centrally heated and air-conditioned homes. Predatory animals are distant things, seen only in zoos or on safari. Even if an animal does become a threat, our guns or poisons soon rob them of their danger. We've placed ourselves at the top of the food chain and no longer have any significant predators.

**Hunter** strips away that illusion and taps into the primeval fear of being prey for larger, more dangerous animals. Whereas our ancestors had the comfort of safety in numbers — as do modern-day hunter groups — a lone hunter lives each day on the raw edge of terror, horribly aware of his own mortality. Yet, go on he must, knowing that nobody else can deal with the monsters.

For this reason, playing a lone hunter makes for an intense and horrific game. Still interested? Good. Let's look at why a hunter might work alone.

#### THE ONLY ONE

*Kirsty sang quietly to herself as she entered East Kilbride. It had been a long day, and she was looking forward to getting home. Gregory had phoned and promised to have dinner ready for her when she arrived. The kids were away. It might be quite a romantic evening. She grinned at the thought.*

*"That was the latest single from Robbie Williams," said the inane deejay through the car stereo. "And now, THE MONSTER MUST DIE."*

*The sudden change in voice jerked Kirsty out of her pleasant daydream. In front of her, crossing the street, was what looked like a walking corpse. Her stomach churned. There was no question in her mind. It was wrong.*

*She slammed the accelerator to the floor and sped straight at the zombie. It turned, a look of surprise on its face. Then the car hit the thing. It sailed through the air and hit the side of a building. The creature struck with enough force to rebound in a heap on the street.*

*Kirsty watched it through the rear-view mirror. It wasn't moving. Good, she thought. Luckily, the street was otherwise deserted. She looped around the block to check whether it was still motionless. It was. Still, it wouldn't hurt to run over it again, just to be sure.*

*As she drove home, she realized that she knew, just as if a voice in her head was talking to her, that there were more of them and that they all had to go.*

*Thoughts of killing carried her the rest of the way home.*

Some hunters are imbued alone. Although group imbuiings are relatively common, sometimes the Messengers choose a lone recipient for their gifts. Hunters are rare enough that some cities might well have only one imbued. Even in places where their numbers are higher, a handful of lone hunters might hunt for months without ever seeing any fellows' markings,

running into another hunter who pursues the same monsters, or finding hunter-net on the web. Each would have no reason to suspect that he is anything other than the only one to see that monsters are real.

Of course, this approach is the hardest for a character. She really is utterly alone. No one else believes any attempt she makes to reveal the truth about the hidden masters of the world. If your character persists in trying to tell people, she starts to question her own sanity. After all, if everyone thinks she's insane and her only proof to the contrary bears all the indications of delusion, it's hard not to go along with public opinion.

More to the point, she has no information to go on except the supernaturally enhanced evidence of her own eyes. She has no way of knowing that the immaterial spirit she sees hovering near (or in) another person is a ghost, or that the human/animal crossbreed she sees is a werewolf. Even if her cultural origins and personal beliefs allow her to accept these facts quickly, such "superstitions" tell your character little about how to deal with these creatures' reality. Having no one to exchange ideas with, or to get her out of trouble if an experiment in "monster control" goes wrong, she has to be very careful indeed.

#### CAST OUT

*Ed ran. He didn't want to think about what he had done. Another hunter was dead and it was his fault. Dammit, he'd murdered a man!*

*But it was the right thing to do.*

*Ed heard Talbot yelling somewhere behind him: "We'll get you, you bastard! There's nowhere you can run that we can't find you! Murderer!"*

*This was it, then. He was on his own. This way would be better. The others were too weak. He'd show them how to pay back the monsters for what they'd done to humanity.*

Some hunters find that they just can't work with other members of the imbued community. Perhaps, like the Avenger in the above story, they adhere so strictly to a creed that they cannot compromise sufficiently to work with the Merciful — or even Zealots less extreme than themselves.

Perhaps, as with Ed, other imbued reject your character for something he did. Not only does he have all the problems faced by lone hunters, but he might also have to face other chosen who are intent upon hunting him down.

At least he does have the advantage of knowing he's not mad, however. Others know about and see the monsters, too. He can't work with them, but at least he doesn't doubt his own sanity.

#### ONCE BURNED

*"You killed him," Liz said.*

*John looked down at her arrogantly. "No. He was already dead. I just put him to rest."*

Liz fought down her anger. "He would have gone anyway. I was doing what he needed. No one would have gotten hurt, and he'd have gone on to his rest. But no, you knew better."

She paused for a moment. "Go. Get out of Durham. If I see you here ever again, I'll report you to the cops. Now, get out of my apartment."

John hesitated, as if he was about to speak. Then he turned and left. As the door closed behind him, Liz sat down wearily. Never again would she work with another of the imbued. They couldn't be trusted. She had to go it alone.

Trust is a big issue for a hunter. More often than not, any other hunter she meets is a complete stranger, sometimes from an entirely different place or of different origins. Your character may have reacted with relief or even joy at meeting another of her kind. Her gratitude at having someone to understand her new life might have been overwhelming.

Can you imagine the effects of having such newfound trust betrayed? Some would abandon the hunt and try to return to a normal life. Most would simply choose to avoid contact with other hunters thereafter.

In many ways, it's this category of lone wolf that best accepts the solitary life. After all, if your character has never met anyone like him, he can always hope there are others. If he's been cast out by one group, he may find another to join. If he has chosen to isolate himself, chances are he'll always work alone.

## ATTITUDES ON HUNTING ALONE

If your character works alone, he can take one of several approaches to the hunt, depending on his creed.

### THE MERCIFUL

In some ways, the Mercy creeds are well equipped for hunting alone. Edges such as Fool's Luck, Hide and Confront (Innocence), Bluster, Insinuate and Be Calm (Redemption), Project and (to a degree) Inflict (Martyrdom) all allow your character to confront the supernatural at close range and stand a good chance of getting away alive.

If you fancy a game focused on intense roleplaying, these creeds offer you that opportunity. Consider the discussions an Innocent might have with a vampire as he tries to understand exactly what it is, or the long debates a Redeemer could undertake with one of the walking dead about the nature of good and evil. Perhaps your character chooses to work with monsters to undo their worst excesses or to help spirits find their rest, as Liz does in the fiction above. *Hunter: The Walking Dead* gives plenty of ideas for chronicles based on working with spirits rather than against them. Also, see "Monsters in Our Lives" on p. 203 for other ideas.

Of course, your character can never be certain that a monster's intentions are genuine. Some turn out to be irredeemable, and others abuse trust for personal gain. Lone Merciful aren't particularly well equipped, either with edges or through inclination, to dispatch deserving or dangerous foes. Many develop skills with weapons merely as self-defense measures.

And, of course, close personal contact with the other side means that a lone hunter and her family are easily compromised by a hostile monster who was only pretending to be decent. The high attrition rate among lone Merciful comes as no surprise. Martyrs who hunt alone often lead spectacularly short careers, unless they can see that surviving in the long-term is the best way to serve humanity as a whole. Even so, their inherent instinct to give up everything for the hunt often puts Martyrs in dangerous situations that, without backup, can cost them their lives.

### THE VISIONARY AND THE LOST

Many lone Visionaries become observers or watchers. Fyodor in *Hunter Apocrypha* is a prime example of this. Although he isn't truly alone, as his associations with Bookworm55 and Violin99 demonstrate, many of the events in which he involves himself require his working alone to understand the nature of the World of Darkness. Characters of this type combine the behavior of the Merciful, by getting close to monsters, with that of the Zealous to destroy some creatures and add to their own knowledge by learning from and about the enemy.

If your character is a Visionary, he may well choose to befriend beings on the other side in hopes of gathering more valuable data about them, data he can incorporate into his "big idea" for the future of the world. Some might choose to step away from the active hunt altogether to remain impartial observers, taking notes and acting only when a situation demands it.

If your character is a Hermit (see p. 16), she is a loner almost by definition. Proximity to other hunters makes the constant voices in her head nigh-intolerable. Many remain committed to the hunt nevertheless, choosing to act as scouts for other imbued. They observe and analyze on their own. Only when they have something that really needs acting on do they approach other hunters to pass on the information as quickly as possible, so others can deal with it.

If you have chosen to play a Wayward (see p. 20), it may well be that other characters simply won't accept your character's single-minded dedication to killing, whatever their motivation. Like Kirsty in the preceding stories, Waywards are forced to find creative ways to detect and destroy the opposition without revealing themselves or exposing themselves to direct risk too often.

Waywards use many of the same techniques as Avengers but are often more proactive in seeking out monsters to destroy. Of the Vision creeds, Waywards are the least likely to directly involve other people in what they do, but they are also the most callous, often caring little about the consequences of their actions for ordinary humans and other hunters. The greater good for humanity served by destroying a monster often outweighs the lesser good of preserving a defenseless life in the eyes of this creed.

#### THE ZEALOUS

The one thing that even the most dedicated Avenger can't afford to do is go toe-to-toe with monsters time and again. While an Avenger's first instinct when confronted by a walking corpse might be to kick the shit out of it, that's not a good survival strategy. Soon or later, she'll come across a monster that can kick back a lot harder.

Avengers, like most Zealots, try to strike from a distance at the monsters that manipulate humanity. Traps, bombs and the sniper's rifle are the stock-in-trade of the lone Avenger. He might be prepared to go directly into combat with a rot, but he does so only as a last resort.

If your character is a Defender who has appointed herself the lone guardian of a particular area, chances are she has the home-turf advantage, which makes surveillance and trap-setting much easier. When working alone, Defenders tend to be the most reactive of creeds, acting only upon the emergence of a monster that poses a threat, direct or indirect, to their charge.

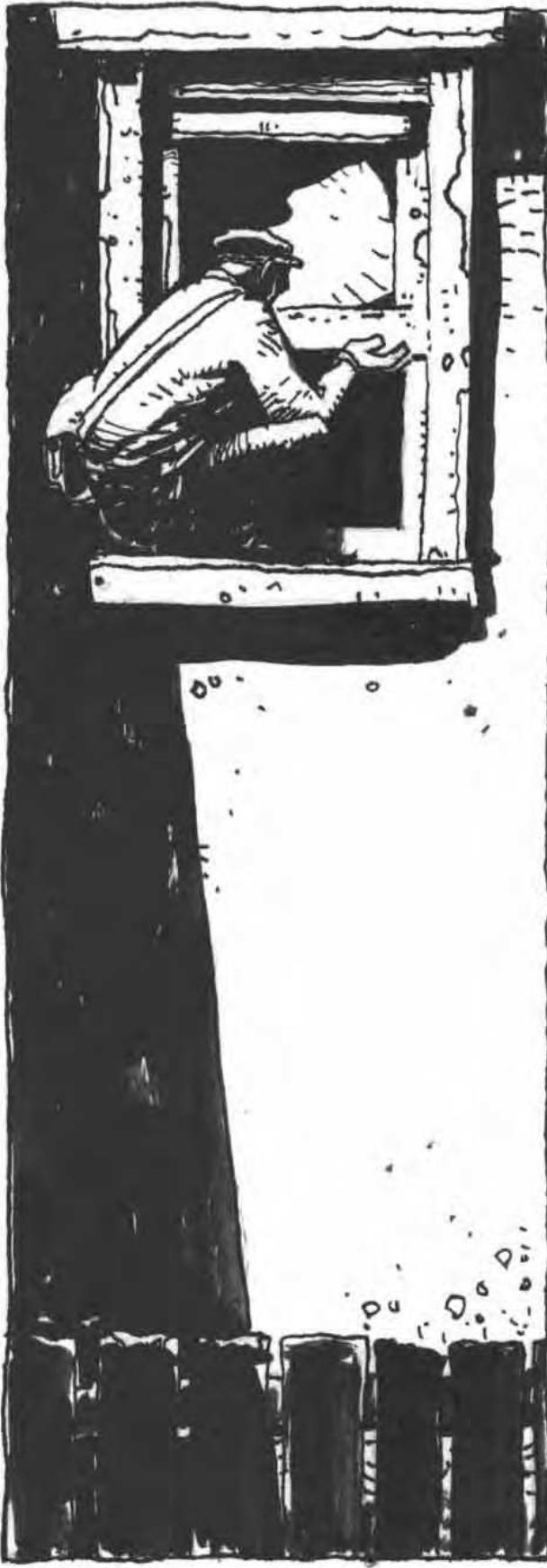
Judges make ideal loners. They watch, they assess, they plan and they carry out sentences. A Judge might spend a month observing the actions of a ghost, then decide to let it go because it threatens no one. He then might spend a few weeks trailing a rot when he can. When it becomes clear that the rot carries out a vendetta against a street gang, the judge decides to act and makes a plan to unite the gang members against the threat — or to speed their downfall.

#### SURVIVING ALONE: A PRIMER

The key to surviving when you hunt alone is simple: anonymity. Two big dangers exist for your character. Foremost are the monsters she tries to destroy, who certainly want to return the favor. Next are the police, who want to catch her for committing criminal acts.

Most direct attacks on the supernatural involve actions that are sure to be perceived as antisocial by people who can't see the creatures for what they are. Unless your character is very clever, even the most indirect assaults against a monster are clearly criminal acts. Few legal systems allow the public use of bombs, random shootings and spike-laden deadfalls.

Equally, breaking and entering is a criminal offense, even if you try to destroy a creature that somehow



feeds on people. A judge won't accept obvious lunacy like that as a defense in court. So, with no one to cover for your character or fabricate an alibi, he has two options: He can go ahead with the crime and do his best not to get caught, or he can try to conduct the hunt in noncriminal ways.

Most hunters, alone or not, want to keep incriminating evidence of the sort that hunting requires well away from their mundane lives. Whereas some things — such as kitchen cleavers and the like — can be justified in most homes, more esoteric trap-making components or surveillance equipment can be much harder to explain away.

Most lone hunters set up several caches of such goods, just in case one is ever compromised. Places such as self-storage facilities, rented garages or isolated cabins outside the city make for ideal storage and workshops. All should be paid for with cash and acquired under an assumed name, of course.

So much for the direct evidence. All your character has to do otherwise is avoid having an obvious motive for a "murder." She has to do her best to keep any obvious connection between herself and her victim from forming. Both the police and monsters tend to look for someone with a personal grudge against the victim, rather than a random killer — after all, most murders, even in the World of Darkness, are committed by people who knew the victim. Luckily, most of the time your character won't have any personal involvement with her victim: She takes down whatever monsters she sees.

Of course, if she knew the monster before she was imbued, or one becomes part of her life by joining the company the hunter works for, say, she better be very cautious indeed in the way she chooses to work against such a creature. As careful, in fact, as any other criminal preparing to commit a crime.

### THE MAKING OF A LONER

Now we know why your character might hunt alone, and have some idea of how she might survive. Let's look at the skills and abilities she needs to keep her alive long enough for you to enjoy the game.

#### TESTING METtle

Although choosing your character's Attributes based on how you believe she approaches the hunt is contrary to the ethos of "normality" (normal people are bereft of experience at hunting monsters) in the game, some compromises may be necessary for solo roleplaying. If you want your character to be in the thick of it, to deal with shamblers head on, Physical Attributes must be primary. A character who's an observer, who picks off a monster only when the opportunity presents itself or once he has formed a plan, is likely to have Mental as his primary category.

A character (often a Merciful one) who specializes in talking to and understanding monsters may choose Social Attributes over the other two.

#### ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR STAYING ALIVE

Let's be realistic. A clueless, spoiled trust-fund child won't survive more than a few minutes as a lone hunter. To endure the problems that the hunt presents, your character needs to have a few practical Abilities.

Streetwise and Subterfuge both give characters extra help in dealing with the mundane world during the pursuit of monsters, especially when it comes to acquiring guns, parts for bombs or other weapons, without such purchases being traceable back to the character. Stealth is also a good choice. It provides your character with a better chance of staying alive long enough to actually get close to a monster.

Many lone hunters find creating traps of various sorts the best way to attack the supernatural. The Traps Skill (see *Hunter Book: Defender*, p. 68) is useful here, allowing a character an understanding of how to build basic, low-tech traps. To make things more interesting and to start including explosive extras and similar nastiness in traps, Skills such as Crafts, Demolitions (if it can be justified), Security and Technology are a good basics.

Security and Technology are good, multipurpose Skills for any lone hunter, allowing her some hope of committing criminal acts such as breaking and entering without getting caught. In a pinch, they even allow her to deal with any evidence that might wind up caught on video cameras and the like.

On the legal side of the fence, investigative Knowledges including Academics, Computer (for searching databases and other electronic files) and, of course, Investigation are invaluable in digging up information about your character's opponents that can be turned to her advantage. Equally, Finance, Bureaucracy and Law can all be useful for turning mundane powers that be against the supernatural.

If your character is to get any help at all, she needs to be very clever about it. People are never going to believe that the local school teacher is actually a corpse returned to life and is feeding off the emotional energy of her pupils. So, your character needs to find inventive ways of turning the public against such a creature. What secrets can she discover about the zombie that might turn public opinion against it and save the children? If there isn't any such incriminating evidence, can your character manufacture some? This sort of lateral thinking is essential. To garner any aid from the unaware, monsters' evil has to be couched in terms the general public can understand. Good ratings in Performance, Leadership or Etiquette don't go to waste, either....

Don't ignore the mundane. Drive is incredibly useful, giving your character much more mobility than public transport offers and, in a pinch, the ability to use a vehicle as a large, metal weapon that can carry itself away from the scene. Sure, it's criminal. But it's pretty damn effective.

For most hunters, physical confrontation is inevitable. Dodge provides a character an improved chance of surviving any pitched battle with the other side, although any sensible lone hunter does his level best to avoid such a situation. Fighting Abilities such as Brawl, Melee and Firearms might not be as useful as they appear: Monsters are tough and taking them on hand to hand or even weapon to weapon isn't wise. If your approach is combat-orientated, however, they're invaluable.

Of course, Merciful imbued who choose talking over destroying need different abilities. Talents such as Empathy and Expression are great for hunters who try to talk to monsters without getting ripped apart after accidentally insulting them. These chosen run a much greater risk of being identified by the other side, however, simply through their proximity to it. Subterfuge can make concealing your character's true identity easier, as can Performance, if she specializes in acting skills.

#### ADVANTAGES

What else might your character have going for him that will serve him well in the months to come? Well, Backgrounds-wise, Allies, Contacts and Influence are good choices, even if the first slightly undermines the notion of working alone. A few people in high (or low) places who can bail your character out of a difficult situation, or friends and family who can offer emotional support without really understanding the truth of the situation can make the business of hunting a bit more bearable. Still, they can't ever

#### REALITY CHECK

As with any choice you make during character creation, you must ask yourself whether your character would really have had the chance to develop these "ideal loner" Abilities before becoming imbued. These guidelines are provided to help you create a character that can function usefully as a solo hunter, not to create the perfect lone-gunner-killing-machine.

That said, a solo character needs to be more rounded than one in a group game. She doesn't have the strengths of other characters to balance her weaknesses. Your choices should be determined by the sort of game you want to play, as the proposed examples of Attribute allocation indicate.

understand monsters the way your character does. In fact, they can't even believe in the existence of such things in any meaningful way. So, while they can offer your character succor, they can't actually join her in the hunt or understand and accept what she does. She remains alone—and involving your friends and family in any way is always dangerous (see below).

Contacts are more distant resources; people with knowledge or access to goods that your character wouldn't otherwise be able to obtain. Someone who can help in this area without asking too many difficult questions might mean the difference between life and death. Contacts are useful but unreliable, and they work toward their own goals. In many ways, dealing with someone who can help but who doesn't really care about who you are and what you do can make a hunter feel even more alone.

Bystanders are just as useful, although they undermine the "working alone" idea still further, as they give your character someone to interact with who knows about the supernatural. Still, they can't see the supernatural in the same manner that an imbued can, and they don't have the same access to edges. A tradition of lone heroes and their sidekicks is venerable enough that the idea doesn't undermine the theme of the game too badly.

Arsenal is certainly useful, if you wish to risk the head-on approach and if your character's origins justify taking it. Certainly, most hunters who take an active physical role in the hunt develop an Arsenal of sorts over time.

Exposure is good if you want your character to have something on which to build confidence that she hasn't gone mad. Previously unexplained encounters that now make sense allow a hunter to keep a grip on sanity without external reassurance. Fame is a positive disadvantage. The last thing a lone hunter wants is attention being drawn to her. It certainly wouldn't do for your character to be recognized by the enemy thanks to some damn movie poster, would it?

Mentor is a no-no. This is an article about hunting alone, after all. On the other hand, Patron is great, giving your character direction through frequent contact with the Messengers. As for Resources, well, they're a double-edged sword. High Resources is useful in terms of your character supporting himself and his hunting habits. On the other hand, higher levels of Resources often indicate a real-world job that demands commitment.

Even for the Zealous, edges that aid in direct confrontation are not as useful as one might think. One on one, most monsters can put a hunter down far too easily. Thus, you might want to consider taking Impact (see *Hunter Book: Avenger*, p. 71) rather



than Cleave to allow your character use of edge-powered weapons from a distance.

Otherwise, information-related edges such as Discern, Witness, Illuminate and Pinpoint are useful counters to the lack of outside information your hunter has. Bluster, Burden, Foresee, Hide, Insinuate and Ward are all great for keeping your character alive when things go wrong, and Rejuvenate literally can be a life-saver many times over.

### FAMILY AND OTHER COMPLICATIONS

Family and friends present a particular dilemma for the lone imbued. She needs her links to an ordinary life and the way she lived before being imbued more than other hunters do. She needs somebody who comforts her and brings her relief from the terrors and demands of dealing with the supernatural on a regular basis.

Without the outlet of other hunters, however, who can understand what is going on and can talk about problems, fears and hopes, relationships with people who are close to an imbued can become very strained. Family can see that your character is scared, stressed, distracted or hurt, and they're sure to become anxious or angry when adequate explanations are not forthcoming. While your character can probably assuage their worries in the short term, the longer it goes on and the wilder the excuses get, the

less likely it is that your character's loved ones swallow them.

So, your character has to try to create excuses that explain the worst effects of the hunt. Perhaps a change of job could make the reasons for the increased stress clear. If your character has taken up a physically demanding sport, the physical damage inflicted becomes explicable. Of course, your character would be sensible to actually spend some time participating in the sport, in case his loved ones decide to check up on him. As a bonus, the extra exercise makes your character a more effective hunter.

Of course, your character could simply walk away from her previous life commitments, but that's easier said than done. Most of all, she needs money to survive and often to pursue the hunt. That means a job, and most jobs involve regular interaction with others.

### JOINING THE CAUSE

*Kirsty had been following the bizarre tug in her head for the last ten minutes. It was definitely calling her toward this back alley. Steeling herself, she eased along as carefully and quietly as she could.*

*What she found surprised her: A hunter symbol was marked on a wall. Wind whipped about the litter in the alley near the sign and nowhere else. Nearby stood a well-built, graying man. He wore a smart but inexpensive suit, and he was visibly agitated. Kirsty stared at him, but she couldn't see anything*

wrong with him. The voices in her head were drowned out by the force she felt, so there was no guidance from them.

"Who the hell are you?" Kirsty demanded, reaching for the knife in her coat. "And what are you doin' tae ma heid?"

"What I am doing to your head is what I call a summoning," the man said, nervousness showing in his obviously English voice. "If you can feel it, you're like me. You see monsters. Maybe you even fight them...?"

Kirsty eyed the Englishman warily. "Aye, mebbe. What's yer name?"

"Well, some people call me Sixofswords, but you can call me Paul." He offered her his hand. "Perhaps we can talk a little?"

He swallowed and forced himself to carry on, despite her silence and obvious mistrust.

So, what prompts a lone hunter to seek the help of others? For some, it's just the relief of actually finding others like them. Hunter code is often the first clue they get. Seeing one of the symbols and intuitively understanding it may well be your character's first evidence that other like him exist.

Alternatively, the symbols can be used to alert others to the character's existence. Markings such as the one meaning "I am alone" are entirely intuitive, after all. What is not intuitive is any certainty that anyone else exists who can (or might) read such a message. The more active versions of the symbols, introduced in *Hunter Book: Visionary* (p. 77) actually allow an imbued to call lone hunters to her, as Sixofswords29 does in the story above.

The benefits are obvious: The hunter still has access to all the skills and methodology she used before, but now she has others to back her up and cover for her. Your character also has people to disagree with her, however. Worse, other hunters might be compromised by police or monsters and reveal your character's identity.

Either of these events can cause a hunter who was previously alone to abandon a group and return to his old ways. Indeed, simple differences of opinion are enough to drive hunters apart. Sometimes, the only person who can understand what your character wants is himself.

#### HUNTER-NET

Introducing hunter-net to a game changes the rules, but certainly not as dramatically as introducing a whole group of hunters in a city. Having your character on hunter-net provides you with somewhat unreliable information on the monsters she might face and with a ready supply of allies. Although Witness1 technically forbids exchange of personal details via the system, people do use it to arrange rendezvous and cooperative projects.

Still, if you want to introduce allies for your character who aren't in his way, hunter-net offers a better way of doing it than introducing your character to a group of hunters residing in the city.

Turning the idea on its head, a solo hunter could use the Internet and the hunter lists as means of faceless contact with other imbued, as sources of information and also as a method by which to keep other imbued at arm's length. After all, why does he need in-the-flesh allies when he can avoid their foibles, weaknesses and vulnerabilities by keeping an electronic distance between himself and all of them? The bickering and hostility seen on many of the hunter lists would be enough to put many imbued off working with each other.

#### IN CONCLUSION

For a player and Storyteller prepared to work on a game with the sort of intensity one-on-one roleplaying offers, playing a lone hunter is a great idea. Many of the themes and issues highlighted here are merely the core themes of *Hunter: The Reckoning* thrown into extreme by the demands of hunting alone.

So, go for it, play the game and accept the likelihood that, even more probably than in a group *Hunter* game, your character's story will most likely end with her death.

Until then, enjoy taking back the night, one monster at a time.

#### LAW AND ORDER

*The thing let out a last, mournful howl, like a dog left out in a thunderstorm, and then the basement fell deathly quiet. The white dust and ash that a moment before had been something not exactly dead settled over the murdered children's bodies in a morbid snowfall. Janet closed her eyes and felt the blood pumping at her temples.*

*Her mind wandered to the mundane details surrounding the horror she had just witnessed. Someone would miss these kids, would want to bury them. She'd have to come up with a story. Maybe a serial killer or something else off the five o'clock news. Anything except the truth.*

*She turned away. She could deal with all that in a few minutes. First, she needed some sun and air. To get away from the death and the screams that still echoed through her. She walked up the concrete steps, tried to ignore the brown-red stains there and opened the basement door.*

*"Police! Get on the ground! Now!"*

*The bright California sun blinded Janet, and she could barely make out the squad cars arrayed in front of the house. Shapes moved from cover behind the cars. "Do it now!"*

*A strong arm wielding a sturdy nightstick swept Janet off her feet, and she smacked facedown onto the gravel. A*



knee backed by 225 pounds of L.A.'s finest dug itself into her back, and she screamed in pain.

"Shut up! Don't move! You're under arrest!" A pair of hands patted her down and took her .38. "Well, look at this."

Janet's eyes were clearing by the time they dragged her to her feet. Two cops stood nearby with their weapons drawn, while another two moved her toward their car. One of them droned out a Miranda warning and slipped cuffs onto Janet's wrists.

"Watch yourself," whispered one of the cops. "You're not alone."

Janet saw the pin on his lapel — a shape that she knew meant, "I am chosen" — just before the car door slammed shut.

Both the **Hunter** rulebook and the **Hunter Survival Guide** offer advice on avoiding entanglements with the law, but what the hell does a dedicated hunter do when all that fails? Let's face it, as seen by the blind, what the imbued do is highly illegal — assault, stalking, murder, kidnapping, breaking and entering. Add to that the fact that a variety of monsters have their clammy hands all over the justice system, and getting busted seems pretty likely for hunters. This article takes you through the process of arrest, trial, imprisonment and release, with an eye toward continuing the hunt throughout.

A caveat, however: This essay deals principally with law and order in the United States and, by limited extension, in the liberal democracies of the West. The assumption is that your hunter faces a justice system that operates under certain rules, that police enforce laws by following established guidelines, that trials are generally fair and that prison terms are imposed according to the laws of the land. That's a nice little dream, of course. Even in the greatest bastions of personal liberty there exist crooked cops, rigged trials and prisoners who mysteriously "commit suicide." In countries with patchier human-rights records, people who get in the way just disappear, and death squads routinely carry out unofficial executions.

What this means for your **Hunter** character is that there's no guarantee of justice. Your character can get screwed royally if a smart monster has subverted the local justice system. Depending on how dark your Storyteller wants to make things, it may be nearly impossible to beat a rap. But (and thank God there's a "but," or this would be one boring game), if the story is still going it's because you can do something. So when the cops break down your hunter's door, keep thinking, stay ready to fight and let this article help you out.

## REMAIN SILENT: ARREST

The key to getting through an arrest is understanding what's going on and what the cops bring to the table. After all, not every arrest, or even every rousting, is equal. Narcotics cops breaking down the door of a suspected meth lab act differently than patrol cops pulling over a suspicious vehicle. Know your enemy.

### PATROL OFFICERS

The stereotypical "boys (and girls) in blue," patrol officers wear uniforms, respond to most calls, walk (or, more often, ride) a beat, and generally provide a deterrent by their visible presence. Assignments are highly variable, from directing traffic and catching speeders (especially state police and highway-patrol forces), to supporting detectives in an arrest, to patrolling dangerous areas, to community relations work. Most officers (especially on small forces) do it all, according to the needs of their community.

Generally, patrol officers are acutely aware of two things: first, that they're underpaid working stiffs disliked by most people they come into contact with; second, that any low-life with a hard-on for cops is going to take it out on them. Oh yeah, and that any of those low-lives could have a gun. So, when a patrol cop pulls someone over, she knows she has to maintain control of the situation. She can't tolerate any bullshit from the civilian and has to be ready to slap him down before he can do anything stupid. Sure, there are cops who are good people at heart, and they may even seem friendly at times — but on the hard streets of the big city, empathy just gets you killed.

Most commonly, hunters deal with patrol cops who show up to ask questions and make sure nothing untoward is going on — which, invariably with hunters, is not the case. Uniforms can and do stop anyone they get a bad feeling about. Ideally, that feeling is a combination of instinct and observation. (Why are the plates on that van so hard to read? Is that a gun under the dashboard?) In many places, though, having the "wrong" skin color is enough to make any civilian appear "suspicious." From a hunter's perspective, that sort of harassment is actually preferable to being pulled over for a legitimate reason — a bigoted cop out to harass an "outsider" for the hell of it is far less likely to notice the 12-gauge hidden in the back seat.

In the United States, actual arrest occurs only if the patrol officer sees a crime in progress or has clear reason to suspect that one has just been committed.

### DETECTIVES

Unlike patrol officers, detectives aren't responsible for deterring crime. They identify and apprehend perpetrators after the fact. Detectives interview wit-

nesses, follow leads and eventually assemble a case. They may or may not work in teams or get help from patrol officers (who might canvass a neighborhood for witnesses, do preliminary interviews or provide backup during an arrest). In small jurisdictions, such as a rural county, a few officers might serve for both patrol and detection, but almost any sizeable force has plain-clothes, specialized detectives. State and federal investigators may take over detection in small jurisdictions faced with major crimes.

*Columbo* and *Inspector Frost* notwithstanding, most detective work isn't brain surgery. Building a case usually involves pounding the pavement, following the most obvious leads and doing a hell of a lot of paperwork. In the case of property crimes — burglary, vandalism — criminals are usually caught after committing the crime repeatedly, once they finally make some mistake or become such a nuisance that they attract substantial police resources. Violent crimes — assault, murder — are usually committed by someone the victim knows, and poking around the perpetrator's life often draws him out.

Detectives are usually less concerned about violence, but are acutely aware of their case load. Another robbery, assault or murder will always pop up. So, if they can't get a good lead — or enough evidence to make an arrest stick — detectives are likely to move on to the next case. Thus, a careful hunter can escape arrest even if the cops are pretty sure she was involved. The key to beating an investigation is getting through the first 48 hours — make sure there are no eyewitnesses to identify the hunter or any damning physical evidence (such as fingerprints, hair or blood; good luck) at the crime scene. If your hunter can manage all these hurdles and the cops can't make a case, they'll drop it. Of course, they'll still keep an eye open and some cops just never give up. And planting evidence is always an option.

When detectives actually make an arrest, they're thinking of making their case. They tend to be careful about reading rights and making sure evidence is collected. If your hunter pisses them off, they may extract some immediate physical retribution, but they ultimately want the arrest to be a good one, at least as far as their superiors are concerned. They're likely to bend or break the rules — planting information or withholding legal aid — only if they know they can get away with it.

### TACTICAL AND QUICK RESPONSE

Special Weapons and Tactics — or SWAT — teams become involved in cases that present an immediate threat of substantial violence. They organize response to hostage situations and raids on dangerous suspects. In the latter case, the arresting officers may be

detectives specially equipped with tactical gear or full-time tactical officers, depending on specific departmental policies and resources.

Tactical officers think of themselves as an elite and view their duty the way a soldier does combat. They become involved only in violent situations and see the world in terms of dangers and targets. During an arrest, they are far less concerned with making a good bust than with eliminating any and all threats. They use much more force than other officers and are likely to respond with deadly force to any resistance. A hunter who waves a gun at a SWAT officer is asking to meet his maker.

Your character's best strategy when faced with cops in tactical gear is to surrender quickly and obviously. Drop to the ground and don't resist unless you have no other choice.

#### BACK AT THE PRECINCT

Once an arrest is made, cops want to make a case stick to a suspect or get him to implicate someone else. Your hunter faces persistent interrogation and having his life investigated so that they can make that happen. Questioning usually consists of a combination of intimidation and psychological trickery designed to make the suspect believe it's in his interest to confess. Depending on whether it's routinely tolerated, violence — from pushing to slaps to beatings to outright torture — may come into play. The police usually imply that if the suspect doesn't come clean he's going to be found guilty anyway, and he can get a lighter sentence by cooperating. The cops also imply or say that any move a suspect makes to defend himself — denying the crime, calling a lawyer — is just going to make matters worse.

Ideally, cops want a suspect to confess and they seek evidence that backs up that confession. Prosecutors, judges and juries love confessions because they make everything easier. Even eyewitness testimony and scientific evidence are no guarantee, whereas a guilty plea is. So, the number-one rule for your hunter is *not to confess*. The police are not your character's friends, and when they say cooperating is better they are *lying*. If possible, get a lawyer and make the cops work for a conviction. Pleading guilty should occur only as part of a plea bargain worked out with a prosecutor.

#### CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS

Hunting supernatural monsters who live among humanity isn't covered in most law books. But the various parts of that task look an awful lot like a variety of mundane crimes. You should know what your character is in for in this life, so here's a quick run down of crimes hunters typically face arrest for:

- **Assault/Battery/Murder:** Hunters kill things that (sometimes) resemble people, and that's very much against the law. In the case of some vampires (and of ghosts), no body remains after the fact, which makes prosecution (or even probable cause for arrest) difficult, but not impossible. In other cases, a handy carcass provides all the evidence needed. Battles with a monster that don't end in destruction can be even worse if the beast is cunning. It can simply call the cops, point to its wounds and say it was attacked. Hard to argue with an eyewitness.

- **Breaking and Entering/Trespassing:** Shambbling corpses may hide out in abandoned buildings, but slick-as-shit vampires have corporate offices and six-figure condos. Someone owns those places, and rarely is it the hunter. Thus, the mission often means going where you don't belong. A sorcerer's wards and a vampire's blood curses may have a hard time stopping the imbued, but a motion detector and an alarm contract can be just as effective.

- **Stalking/Harassment:** Hunters hunt. That means your character follows targets, tries to establish their patterns and uncovers their secrets. Unless he's very careful, he can be charged with stalking. A blood-sucking witch doesn't have to curse you to stop you from following her; she can get the local boys in blue to have a talk with you. If they pat you down and find a handgun, things could get ugly. If a hunter persists, he can be arrested, face a court order to stay away or suffer other consequences.

- **Illegal Possession of Firearms or Explosives:** Owning firearms in the United States is relatively easy to do legally. Even in the Land of the Well-armed, however, walking around with a sawed-off shotgun is a good way to get busted. In Europe and other places, firearms draw even more harsh attention. Not only can severe penalties for illegal possession result, but being armed while committing another crime usually upgrades that crime — breaking and entering becomes armed robbery, assault becomes attempted murder. Cops facing an armed perp are much more likely to use their weapons, too.

- **Kidnapping/Unlawful Imprisonment:** Merciful imbued spend much of their time on the hunt trying to help the victims of monsters and the monsters they feel can be saved. One common strategy is to take the slaves of a creature away from it and isolate them in an attempt to free them from thraldom. Unfortunately, doing so by force is a crime. A savvy vampire can easily convince the police that his missing "aide" has been abducted by survivalist freaks.

- **Theft, Grand and Petty:** The hunt can be expensive, and once you realize that some devils drive Porsches, "liberating" materiel or funding can

become a real temptation in your crusade. Unlike street dealers or other mundane criminals, careful monsters don't really fear the law, though. So, when their legitimate business profits, cars or televisions disappear, they tend to call the cops. Even petty theft — such as swiping a gun or wallet from a beast's bodyguard — can lead to entanglements. Giving the police any reason to pay attention to your character is asking for trouble.

- **Fraud/Failure to Pay/Tax Evasion:** Focusing on the hunt means that balancing a checkbook, making alimony payments, paying a mortgage and all the other financial necessities of everyday life have to take a backseat to the mission. Of course, going into debt won't bring a SWAT team to your hunter's door, but in extreme cases it can lead to accusations of larceny (say, you used your client's money to buy bulletproof vests and ammo) and the issuing of an arrest warrant. Some clever monsters paralyze their enemies by framing them for such crimes.

- **Child Abandonment:** Once you wake up to the fact that monsters are out there and that you have to contend with them, wanting to protect the ones you love is a natural response. Many hunters believe they are poison to their non-imbued friends and family — being close to the imbued can be a death-sentence — and so leave them for their own good. It may be the best thing in the world for a woman to leave her son and husband behind while she goes off to fight the good fight, but the abandoned husband and the local authorities might not see it that way. Your hunter may well face prosecution for doing what's best for her children.

## NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH: TRIAL

Assuming that the cops can gather (or manufacture) enough evidence to make it worth some prosecutor's time and effort, the next step is a trial. In the United States, felony trials take place before a jury of the accused person's peers — 12 supposedly random people who, for the most part, don't give a shit one way or the other. If your hunter pleads guilty, there won't be a trial *per se*. In fact, the process from arrest to sentencing is divided into a series of steps.

Your hunter's first time before a judge is probably her *arraignment*. At this stage, she's told just what she's accused of — second-degree murder, assault with a deadly weapon — asked if she has a lawyer and required to enter a plea. Arraignment usually occurs within a few days of arrest. If a hunter is smart, she has already talked to a lawyer and thus knows how to plead. If she pleads guilty (as part of a plea bargain), she goes on to sentencing at a different time.

If her plea is "Not guilty," the next step (in the United States, at least) is either a *grand jury hearing* or

a *preliminary hearing* before a judge. Here, the prosecutor has to show good reason to go forward with the case — guilt isn't decided yet, but the state must show probable cause. A grand jury is a bunch of regular citizens who receive some instructions from the prosecutor; a preliminary hearing takes place before a judge. In general, prosecutors have probable cause or they don't bring charges in the first place, so this step is mostly a formality.

Then comes the jury trial, the heart of the entire process. It involves numerous steps. During *pre-trial discovery*, both sides share evidence so that the playing field is level. The defense usually gets time to prepare its defense, although the amount of time depends on the inclination of the judge (and the skill of the lawyer). *Jury selection* whittles down the pool of potential jurors (drawn at random from voter registration rolls or other sources) to the 12 jurors and their alternates. The prosecution then presents its case, calling witnesses (either people who have information about the crime or experts with relevant knowledge) and entering evidence into the record. The defense gets to cross-examine witnesses and may object to various tactics. Then, the defense presents its case in a similar form. After both sides have presented their cases, the judge instructs the jury on points of law and procedure it should be aware of. The jurors withdraw to reach a unanimous verdict. When they do, that verdict is read and the suspect is either released or sent on to sentencing. If the jury can't reach a verdict, it is said to be a hung jury and a mistrial results. Sentencing is usually the judge's prerogative, within legal limits such as minimum sentences. In the case of a capital trial, the jury must sometimes decide whether or not to impose the death penalty.

How long this whole process takes depends on the case. In a straightforward breaking and entering with no legal heavyweights involved, the case can be over in a few weeks without much time spent in a courtroom. In a high-profile murder case, with lawyers barraging the judge with motions and points of law, the case can take upwards of a year.

## BAIL AND DETENTION

A critical question for a hunter on trial is where he spends the time between court appearances. In all but the most serious cases, a judge sets bail, an amount of money the defendant must give the court in exchange for the right to remain free until his trial is over (the money is then returned). The amount of bail depends on the crime, the likelihood the defendant will commit more crimes, and the probability that he'll flee. In the case of violent criminals, the judge can decide that no bail is warranted. In that instance — or if the defendant can't

make bail — he languishes in a city or county jail between court appearances.

If at all possible, your hunter should make bail. Organizing a defense and avoiding monstrous eyes while in jail can be difficult. Accused murderers often aren't granted bail, but if it's offered take it and use the freedom to prepare your character's defense or finish the job he started. The only exception is if you believe the monster doesn't have access to the jail — then your hunter just might be safer with bars and cops between him and the outside world.

#### COGS IN THE LEGAL MACHINE

Many people participate in a criminal trial apart from the defendant (your hunter, presumably). Knowing what these people do, what they want, and how they can be manipulated is critical to getting through a trial that is tainted by monstrous influence. The following are the major players:

- **Bail Bondsman:** A bondsman is in the business of advancing money to suspects so they can make bail, in exchange for a payment (generally 10 percent of the total bail). If the defendant doesn't show up in court, the bondsman loses the money, so he usually hunts down the felon. He may do so himself or by hiring professional bounty hunters. Bondsmen make good pawns for a monster that wants muscle and money, so be careful when dealing with them.

- **Bailiff:** A bailiff is a police officer or other trained law-enforcement professional who works for a judge and is responsible for maintaining security in the courtroom. He enforces the judge's rules and protects the judge and public from any dangers. A bailiff doesn't have a lot of say over the course of a trial, so he isn't a target for control or bribery by anyone who wants to influence a trial's outcome. If a creature wants to make sure a defendant dies in transit, or give a prisoner a good shot at escape, the bailiff is the person to influence.

- **Defense Attorney:** This lawyer is your hunter's advocate and voice in court. She may be a private attorney — in which case your character or some third party pays her for her work — or a public defender, who works for the state representing defendants who can't afford a lawyer. A public defender is typically inexperienced, underpaid and overworked. A private attorney is usually ambitious and money-hungry. Either way, she is the most important person in the courtroom as far as your hunter is concerned. Without a good defense your character is, to be blunt, royally fucked. So, any monster that wants to sway the trial is likely to target her, and it's critical that your hunter keep his defender free of any supernatural influences.

- **Judge:** The judge runs the show. He decides on procedural matters, what evidence is admissible, who can say what and when, and he directs the jury. In

court, he is the law. Of course, he does have to abide by procedure and precedent because not doing so sets up the possibility of successful appeals. Nevertheless, he remains the most powerful single person in the courtroom. In all likelihood, he likes having that power. After all, judges are appointed or elected, so they have to play the political game. Judges are prime targets for manipulation by the enemy, of course.

- **Jurors:** Jurors are regular schmoes called up largely through random selection and asked to decide on guilt or innocence. They have no special training and usually just want to go home. Manipulating jurors is the whole point of a trial — each side tries to convince them that it's in the right. Monsters and imbued working behind the scenes may be tempted to influence jurors, but doing so is harder than it seems. It has to be done after the jury selection process (and so has to be quick), and if the monster wants a guilty verdict it must control all the jurors to ensure a unanimous decision. Jurors in high-profile trials are often sequestered, which makes influencing them all the more difficult. In the end, it's better for a monster or hunter to influence the jury-selection process (by rendering some jurors ill or ineligible) than the actual jurors.

- **Prosecutor:** The prosecutor — sometimes called the district attorney or the state's attorney — is your hunter's enemy. Her goal is quite simply to get your character found guilty and sentenced to the maximum possible penalty. Her pride and career depend on getting solid convictions, and your character is probably just another stepping stone toward a higher office. Ironically, this adversarial role means that she probably isn't the direct slave of a monster. Self-interest, social pressure and professional duty make her want to take you down, so there's just no need to turn her into a pawn. If your character can somehow affect her performance in court, however, that can be a worthwhile tactic (but one that probably earns anyone caught at it a trial of his own). One strategy is to get evidence of monstrous activity to the prosecutor: She might not believe that the bite mark on your stump of an arm matches that headless cop's neck, but such facts can be disruptive to her strategy. A less ethical (or more desperate) hunter could of course send allies to harass the prosecutor. Doing so runs the risk of merely making her mad, of course.

- **Witnesses:** Witnesses testify about the crime. They have either direct knowledge (as an eyewitness or someone who corroborates an alibi) or they are experts (such as a ballistics specialist or a forensic psychologist). Either way, their testimony usually is gone over twice — once in a deposition and once in front of the jury. The deposition takes place before the lawyers and the judge, and it can still be read into

the record even if a witness is subsequently manipulated or becomes unavailable. Witnesses are tools and targets of influence — they can be bribed, intimidated and controlled even without monstrous powers. Those beasts that can make people see or hear things can easily manufacture witnesses to events that never really happened.

#### FIGHT THE POWER

Beyond the normal, legal methods of defense — building a solid case — hunters have a few other tricks up their sleeves. Even in a courtroom arrayed against them, the Messengers haven't left the chosen without the ability to fight back.

Second sight is probably your character's single most important ability during a trial. Knowing who is a monster or a monster's slave is key if your character is going to survive the process. You act differently if the judge is possessed than if your lawyer is, after all. Edges that enhance second sight are very valuable as well, be they Discern, Illuminate, Pinpoint or Witness. Illuminate is dangerous because creatures become aware of the hunter, but the other powers can be used more subtly. Discern is especially useful because it allows for surreptitious observation — the hunter can even sit with his eyes closed and observe the jury members who don't breathe.

The second most important strategy is protecting your hunter and his allies against monstrous predation. Conviction (in the gaming sense) is the primary weapon in this struggle, but it usually protects only the hunter. Finding a way to guard your attorney, the jurors or any key witnesses is essential to any chance at success. The Innocence edge Inspire is very useful for this, because you can use it to spend Conviction on a normal person's behalf. The Judgment edge Anathema can also function to effectively remove one person from a monster's feeding pool. Innocent charms and Defender tokens also extend some safety to allies.

Some edges allow you to take a more active role if a shadow war is going on in the courtroom. Foresee and Delve, which allow Visionaries to see into the future and the past in limited fashion, can garner critical information. What question is a lawyer going to ask on cross-examination? What was said during a closed-door session?

Edges such as Insinuate, Burden and Balance can actually attack a monster in court. Insinuate, which depends on asking a question, is especially effective if a witness is a monster. She is likely to break down on the stand, making her testimony difficult to sustain.

#### BY REASON OF INSANITY

So, you hear voices that tell you to fight zombies who hide among us? Can you say "schizophrenia"? How about "paranoid delusions"?

Plenty of occasions arise in which a hunter wants to tell others the truth about the hunt. When faced with prosecution for murder or another serious crime, it can be very tempting to just spill the beans. The non-imbued, after all, tend to see such admissions as evidence of mental disorder, so making them can be a quick road to a psychiatric defense. Instead of being a convicted murderer, your character can be diagnosed as ill and get treatment. Unless no other choice exists, don't do it. As tempting as a padded cell is, it's still a cell. Politicians get in an uproar about killers beating a rap through an insanity plea, but rarely does court-ordered psychiatric treatment mean a pleasant future. Your hunter is likely to end up in a pretty rough, violent ward, under even closer supervision than a regular prisoner, and drugged to the gills on antipsychotic medication — all of which impairs his ability to deal with imprisonment. Also, keep in mind that such

#### GOING UP THE RIVER

Your character may very well not be able to escape her legal entanglements — or not for quite some time, at least. If cops saw her put three rounds into a little boy's head, it probably won't matter that the boy died three years ago and rose from his grave. A skilful lawyer might use death records to show why the crime was "impossible" and so get your character released; or she might eventually escape from jail. But all that takes time — months, possibly years.

If the Storyteller and the other players don't want to put the rest of the chronicle on hold for that time, making another character is a viable alternative. Put your first hunter on the back burner while the case builds and introduce a new character. Presumably, the other imbued won't let their buddy rot, so your first character can make occasional appearances, while you still get to play in the ongoing game.

This type of character-switching offers you plenty of possibilities. First, it's a good way to outright retire your earlier character. Sent to Attica for 20 to life, he's effectively out of the chronicle — but the other imbued can visit her, and solo prison stories are always a possibility for old time's sake. If you (and the Storyteller) intend to return her to "active duty" eventually, your substitute character can be wilder and not too long for this world. Try out an extremist with multiple derangements, a bystander or even a hunter on his way to corruption. You should consult with the Storyteller when making these choices, but such a change of pace can be a blast.

incarceration often continues until a patient is cured — and there are no cures for the hunt.

Also, remember that spouting the truth attracts all the wrong kinds of attention. The blind may see your hunter as crazy, but the flesh-eating monstrosity watching from behind the scenes knows better. And it's sure to know just where your hunter is locked up. Accidents happen to psych-ward patients all the time... and to their families.

Keep the truth to yourself. It's safer that way.

### DOING TIME: INCARCERATION

With a few exceptions, the crimes a hunter can be convicted of lead to jail time. Not all cells are created equal, however. Different crimes and jurisdictions lead to different types of incarceration, and these variables have everything to do with what's in store for your imbued convict. Some common forms of incarceration include the following:

- **City Lockup/County Jail:** Even before your hunter is convicted, he may spend a lot of time behind bars. If he can't make bail, he spends time in a jail — a temporary holding facility full of fellow defendants. These facilities can be small detention centers or huge, big-city complexes, but they are always very unstable. Their population is always changing, with people thrown together pretty haphazardly. Killings and suicides are not uncommon;

monsters (and hunters) can and do contribute to those incidents.

- **Minimum Security/Work Release:** Individuals who are found guilty of nonviolent crimes and who aren't considered threats to society may end up in minimum-security prisons. Federal prisons of this sort are called "Club Fed" because of their reputation for pampering white-collar criminals. Of course, it's still prison, but little violence occurs in these settings, sentences are relatively short and access to the outside world is encouraged. Most prisoners participate in training and work-release programs that allow them to spend some time in the outside world. Minimum security is not much of a monstrous hunting ground, if only because prisoner deaths are highly unusual and draw attention.

- **Medium Security:** A medium-security prison is the basic cellblock stereotype. The population is a mixed bag of armed robbers, drug dealers and others. Access to the outside world happens through regular visits from friends and family and through limited vocational classes. Violence is hardly unknown, prison gangs are endemic, guards are bullies and the strong thrive. Monsters who are subtle predators have a good time with these prisons — either by masquerading as guards or slipping about unseen. Anger, boredom and frustration exist in equal quantities here.



- **Maximum Security:** Violent criminals and ones whom the courts want to make examples of end up in maximum security. Murderers, rapists, child molesters and drug dealers rub shoulders in an explosive powder keg controlled by thuggish guards. Rehabilitation is largely illusory — these facilities are designed to lock convicts away, often for life. If convicts end up killing each other, well, only liberal troublemakers are gonna care. Monsters who find ways to move freely throughout such cages of hate and despair *love* these places. Gang rape, casual assault and cold-blooded murder are the bread and butter of maximum security.

- **Death Row:** Maximum-security prisons in states with the death penalty may have a "death row," a wing where prisoners condemned to die await execution. Generally, they have a long wait. It can take over a decade to go through all the appeals, stays of execution and other legal rigmarole. Death row isn't a good place for most monsters, except for ghosts and other things that feed directly on despair and pain. Those emotions are abundant on death row — as is boredom. Lots of boredom.

- **Solitary (and Worse):** Prisoners who break rules lose their few privileges. In maximum-security situations, they may end up in solitary confinement, where they stay in a small cell 24 hours a day without any human contact. Stays of 30 days or more aren't unusual in tough penitentiaries. This isolation can wear down a lot of hard-cases. Of course, in many countries, such imprisonment is hardly exceptional. Political prisoners and others outside the larger democracies face harsh sentences and time in work camps. These situations are great for monsters that feed on anger and frustration.

#### DON'T DROP THE SOAP

The number-one rule of life on the inside is *survive*. You do what has to be done; eat or be eaten. Prison, even minimum security, is not fun. At best, it's a test in patience and perseverance — just getting by as long months of monotony drag onward. At worst, it's a hell of hard labor alongside violent and abusive maniacs, some in chains, others in guard uniforms. But, if ever there were a group prepared for the hardships of imprisonment, it's the imbued.

On the street, your hunter has faced inhuman killers and ungodly monstrosities. She has forged allegiances of necessity with other desperate souls. She has sacrificed her comforts for the cause. She has gone to war. Compared to all that, racist gangs and hard-core killers aren't quite as big a deal. Hunters have a fire that the blind just don't share, and in the predatory pressure cooker of a prison,

others quickly pick up on that quality. Your hunter may be able to stare down bullies or find that others just don't challenge her as much.

That isn't to say that prison is *safe*, just that it isn't that much more dangerous than the streets.

#### A SHIV AND A DREAM

Just because she's in a cell doesn't mean your hunter's "career" is done. The same drives and visions that brought her to the mission in the first place follow her wherever she goes. But carrying on the hunt from prison is not easy. Basically, you have to wait for the monsters to come to you, as your freedom of movement is curtailed. Thankfully, all things come to those who wait. Imbued convicts eventually come across inhuman horrors — be they vampires sucking prisoners dry, zombies in guard uniforms or the ghosts of death-row inmates. The agglomeration of the violent and the hopeless seems to draw the beasts like flies to especially fragrant shit.

The first question your hunter needs to ask himself is whether he *wants* to carry on the mission behind bars. After all, if you learn that a prison guard is really a vampire who's drinking the blood of killers and rapists, it might be a better idea to just lay low and let the fucker gorge itself. Does the monster's choice of victims make a difference?

If you decide that the hunt is worth pursuing, your chosen's watchwords must be patience and planning. If she gets caught, there's no place to run. She has to wait for the perfect opportunity and cover her ass at all times. If the monster has no mortal identity (a ghost, for example), destroying or banishing it may require simply getting some time alone and unobserved. If the thing looks like a prisoner, jailhouse murder can be covered up as just another gang fight. Your hunter may face an additional sentence or time in solitary, but if she's already up the river for 20 years, that's not too much of a concern.

If the thing is disguised as a guard or another prison official (a psychiatrist or a warden, say) things become *much* harder. Killing a guard isn't easy and leads to a lot of trouble. Even if the other guards are regular Joes, they're likely to exact lethal vengeance on a prisoner who kills — or even tries to kill — one of their own. Your hunter may think it's worth dying for the cause, but suicide is a fool's game. A better strategy is to set up another prisoner as a patsy — make it look as if he did the killing. Luckily, prisons are full of proven murderers. Of course, letting another human, even a felon, pay for your hunter's actions might seem terribly unfair, but some sacrifices need to be made.

Right?

## BACK ON THE STREET: PAROLE AND RELEASE

Assuming your character can lay low or otherwise survive incarceration and you want to play a former convict, life after prison becomes your major concern. But life outside is never easy, least of all for someone who still hears voices and sees monsters.

### ENOUGH ROPE TO HANG YOURSELF

Parole is not the same as freedom. It's a conditional release, counted as part of a prisoner's sentence and designed to help ease overcrowding and to ensure some sort of transition from incarceration to freedom. Ideally, parole helps prevent recidivism—it stops ex-cons from getting back into trouble. In most cases, it's just one more hoop to jump through, your parole officer one more bureaucrat who doesn't give two shakes about your fate.

Nonviolent felons such as car thieves and burglars usually end their sentences with a stint of parole. Violent criminals get parole only if they can convince a parole board that they are reformed enough to be permitted back among society. Most of these convicts have to make several requests over long years of incarceration before they gain parole. The length of parole depends on the length of the overall sentence.

The conditions of parole depend on the prisoner's record both before and during incarceration, but all parolees must report to and obey a parole officer and refrain from any and all criminal activity. Former prisoners are banned from associating with other convicted felons, and sometimes they are forced to wear electronic locating devices or abide by other special conditions. All parolees are expected to find regular work and become so-called productive members of society. Beyond regularly scheduled meetings with a parole officer, the parolee is subject to surprise visits, calls at work and other inspections. Parolees cannot own firearms and must obtain special permission to change their city of residence. In other words, parole is a pain in the ass, made bearable only because it's an improvement over prison.

For a hunter, it's a living hell. Almost everything about the hunt is made harder by parole. Keeping odd hours, associating with troublemakers, being present at possible crime scenes ("No, officer, I have no idea how those rotting body parts got scattered all over the street."), carrying weapons, getting into fights—can all get you booted right back into the slammer. Unless your boss is a fellow imbued or a bystander, you have to find time to get your work done and be available, because getting fired is also likely to land you back behind bars. Add a parole officer regularly calling your boss or dropping by unannounced, and a "suc-

cessful reintegration into society" doesn't seem very likely, does it?

### MAKING IT WORK

The only way to make the hunt compatible with parole is deception. Just as with your hunter's life before incarceration, she has to convince the world (and her parole officer) that she's just your average Jane Doe. The early part of any parole is the most important time frame for achieving this illusion. The early days and weeks of parole are when a parole officer decides how much of a risk your character is, makes surprise visits and generally makes the parolee a priority. If your character can convince him that she isn't a troublemaker, more foolish lawbreakers will eventually draw his attention.

So forget about the hunt early in the parole. Take mental notes if you come into contact with the enemy, but don't act. Find a job, pay your rent and be a good little citizen. Lay low and wait. Once the surprise visits die down, once you've got a job you can keep, once your new life becomes routine, then you can consider stepping up. Yes, that means you may have to sit back and watch a *thing* get its way. You have to sit on your hands and let it win one—because you're being watched, and if you act, you lose.

Once you're no longer an immediate concern, you can get back to the hunt, but *carefully*. Your parole officer is probably an overworked slob, but that doesn't make him totally blind and stupid. Even if he thinks you're tame, he'll still make a few checks and calls. So, you still have to keep the job and be around, but you can risk a few nights "on the town." As long as you don't get caught, he won't know you fight the good fight instead of hitting the clubs.

Teamwork and planning are essential when returning to the hunt. Working with other hunters, you can monitor your parole officer himself. Get to know his schedule better than he knows yours. Know when he makes his check-up calls, when he goes to check on prisoners, and when he holes up with his wife. Then, you can act safely.

### THEY'RE WATCHING YOU

Of course, the possibility exists that a parole officer is one of them. Although such a problem would be grave, at least second sight reveals that challenge fairly easily. A more insidious danger is that the parole officer is just your average schmoe but is being used. A smart, power-hungry monster could very well get its claws into the local department of corrections. It could then use legitimate authority to keep an eye on certain individuals (who might have killed or harassed a fellow beast, for example). If your parole officer's reports end up on the desk of that sort of boss, you have to be even

**FRIENDS IN HANDY PLACES**

The imbued are neither numerous nor especially well organized. Most hunters operate largely alone or in small groups, perhaps with some contact to others through hunter-net. The one advantage the chosen have is that they can be anywhere, including in the justice system. In fact, given that the call comes to those who cross paths with monsters and have some impulse to deal with them, cops, lawyers, social workers, judges and the like make for good imbuing candidates.

So, a hunter who ends up on the wrong side of the law is well advised to subtly seek out anyone who might have heard the call and be in a position to help. Standing up in court and crying out, "I see dead people!" won't help, but using hunter code or dropping hints might bring any potential allies into the open. This technique is also a good way for a player to provide a Storyteller with a hook for introducing a new character or subplot.

Fair warning, however: Heaven and Storytellers help those who help themselves. Sitting back, scrawling hunter code on a cell wall and hoping for an imbued savior is pretty lame. Any such call for help should be only one part of how your character deals with arrest. Have her get ready for trial, try to prepare her defense, search for her enemies and protect her friends. When and if exterior help comes, it's likely to be nothing more than some advice or protection (a bystander public defender or an imbued prison guard). Actually resolving problems is up to you.

more careful. But of course, you have no way of knowing whether that might be happening until it's too late. So, assume you're being watched.

Hey, no one said this would be easy.

**SOURCE CODE**

The justice system is a complex and arcane beast. If you want to learn more, the following books may be useful. They all helped in the writing of this essay.

- *How to Try a Murder: The Handbook for Armchair Lawyers*, by Michael Kurland (Macmillan)
- *Order in the Court: A Writer's Guide to the Legal System*, by David S. Mullally (Writer's Digest Books)
- *Police Procedural: A Writer's Guide to the Police and How They Work*, by Russel Bintliff (Writer's Digest Books)
- *The Writer's Complete Crime Reference Book*, by Martin Roth (Writer's Digest Books)

**WORKING TOGETHER**

"I don't like this. Something isn't right." As he spoke, Simon's head turned back and forth to take in the barren stretches of shopping center and almost empty parking lot that surrounded them.

Carson looked around as well, not realizing how much more of the poorly lit mall that Simon could see. "What?" he said. "Everything seems okay to me."

To Simon, the lot's towering (and mostly nonfunctional) light fixtures might as well have been burning at triple strength. Hiroko and Carson stood concealed with him near the entrance to the derelict cinema. Hefty ornamental pillars provided excellent cover there. Midway across the parking lot, John and Peter sat low in the van. Maddy was just visible at the perimeter, on a grassy bank near a courier-service booth.

Even the thoroughfare bordering the mall had been quiet for some time, its stream of rush-hour commuters having dwindled hours earlier. The shopping center itself had been closed long enough for the guard to have made his last pass before sneaking in the nap he took nightly in the cab of his tiny pickup. He was on the far side of the mall. Meanwhile, their contact, who called herself "Catherine" — Simon knew she was lying but saw no reason to confirm this obvious untruth to the others — stood off to their left, in the shadowed doorway of a pizzeria. To the right, an undeveloped plot of land extended alongside the southern edge of the center.

"Seems' is exactly right," Simon finally said. "Maybe you should use a little... foresight?"

"Now? Are you sure?" Carson said.

"Trust me," said Simon.

"He's right," Hiroko chimed in. The words so surprised Simon that he turned and stared at her. Hiroko appeared not to notice. "Catherine looks unsettled," she said. "She's usually calm. Tonight she's fidgety, like she's out of—"

"They'll come from over there!" Carson said, focus returning to his eyes as he faced right and gazed into the darkness. "I think it's a set-up!"

Simon and Hiroko spoke simultaneously, she to Carson, he into his walkie-talkie.

"It is not a set-up. Catherine would not betray us, and it's unworthy of you to suggest it."

"Heads up, people. We have company coming from the south. Let me know if anything moves out there."

John and Maddy acknowledged Simon's warning. Carson looked slightly dazed, and hurt.

Simon appeared grim. "We're changing the plan. Let's get the van over here so we can be ready to move out fast. It's more defensible, and we'll have a better view of those fields."

Hiroko shook her head. "Catherine may not understand. We should not surprise her. She does not like



surprises. Stick with the original plan." She looked at Carson, and then they both turned to look at Simon.

"Forget the original plan," Simon said. "She'll understand. She's smart." Hiroko grimaced but didn't say anything. Simon activated the walkie-talkie again. "John, bring the van to the front of the theater. We'll have our chat in it. Preferably in motion."

As the van's engine revved to life, Hiroko stepped into the open to beckon Catherine toward them. Simon saw their informant look up uncertainly, the taint clearly visible across her features. Hiroko waved at her cheerfully, and after a moment's hesitation, Catherine walked over to meet them. The van swerved sharply just short of the curb and stopped. John kept the engine running and the lights off. Catherine continued moving, a bit more speedily now.

The walkie-talkie crackled. "I can hear something moving in the field," Maddy said.

Simon cursed, then said to Hiroko, "Let's all see what we're dealing with here." He looked to the right and could pick out the black-light coronas of several dead things approaching through the tall grass. He glanced left to see that Catherine had started running toward them. "Maddy, get ready to fall back to the mall. We'll have the van over there in about a minute. John, have Peter wait in the back with his equipment in case anyone needs his help." He lowered the walkie-talkie. "Carson, be ready to give

Maddy some support."

Hiroko sprinted out to meet Catherine, signaling frantic explanations as she moved. As the pair hurried back toward the van, shots echoed across the lot. Carson and Maddy fired their pistols at a group of rotting things that had emerged into view. The rots slowed a bit as they realized they were being fired upon. Simon pulled his own gun and fired a covering shot at the things to give them a second angle of fire to worry about. He exchanged a glance with Hiroko and nodded toward the van.

"You will need to come with us if you are to be safe," Hiroko said to Catherine. Catherine looked worried but allowed herself to be pulled inside with Peter. Simon stepped away to get a better angle, and fired off several more shots while Carson tumbled into the van. Carson slammed the door shut as they sped forward.

Maddy better be ready, Simon thought.

One of the many things that hunters have to come to terms with is the fact that different imbued — often reflected by their different creeds — have different objectives in the hunt. Sure, everyone wants to make the world safe for humanity, but plenty of disagreements arise on the best way to go about it. The most obvious polarity is between Avengers, who want to kill monsters, and Redeemers, who want to save them. But it's just as likely that they will agree to pursue a fleeing creature — albeit for different reasons — while a

Defender wants to stay put, where everyone is safe. Unity is extremely important for any group of characters who want to stay in one piece, so disputes have to be settled quickly. Varying opinions have to be reconciled effectively if the characters are going to have a chance in the hunt. If your hunter can't trust his allies, he won't last long.

Each of the creeds possesses a unique focus and perspective on the hunt. As with any specialization, this is both a strength and a weakness, and it means that groups with characters belonging to a broad variety of creeds are potentially a lot stronger than groups with a very narrow focus. Single-creed groups can more easily make the mistake of thinking the supernatural is uniform or predictable. Although they are very powerful in their specialty area, they are easy to lure into ambushes, the role of pawns or other traps. Multi-creed groups have a wider array of skills and attitudes, and therefore tend to be far better at dealing well with a range of situations.

This article investigates the reasons and ways you and your character can encourage and maintain teamwork among hunters. Although there are no actual game rules about group interaction, how your hunter behaves and interacts with his allies is vital to determining how effective, cohesive and reliable a group they are.

## STAYING TOGETHER

The initial formation of a hunter group is probably inspired by the Storyteller. She provides the narrative underpinnings for the way the group comes together. It may be that your characters are imbued together, that they knew each other beforehand, that they all have a mutual interest or social origin in common, or that they just find each other more or less at random and agree to work together. However it occurs, once the Storyteller does the work of explaining how your group meets, it's up to you and the other players to make sure that the group stays together. After all, if personality clashes between characters get so bad that the group splits, some characters probably have to become Storyteller-controlled, which defeats the purpose of playing together.

There are numerous means by which individuals in groups possess different opinions and yet stay together. Ways of "playing well with others" can be seen both in the real world and in films, TV and books. Fiction in particular is a rich source of ideas, because group tension is dramatic and tends to play a part in many stories.

One of the most effective anchors for group diversity is having a strong leader. The group is controlled by someone with a forceful personality who is respected, needed or feared by the others. That person

thus has the power to force his decisions onto everyone else autocratically. Some leaders are fairly tyrannical, come to their own decisions and expect others to obey without question. Others may be inclusive and tactful, asking everyone's opinion about situations and then reaching a balanced decision. In either case, once any decision has been made, discussion stops. Some dangers lurk in this model, though. If decisions never favor one particular character, that person is sure to become resentful and possibly mutinous. A worse risk is the burden of responsibility. One or two bad choices can severely undermine a leader's confidence, making him weak and indecisive, and guilt from botched operations may cause severe stress, even derangement. Finally, if the leader is incapacitated or killed, the rest of the group might fall apart temporarily and be vulnerable during that time.

Many groups look to some greater motivator, beyond a strong leader, to stay with each other. For centuries, religion has united many people of extremely different origins. For hunters, a common set of deeply held beliefs, a clear vision or some specific, vitally important goal can provide a cause to rally around. Some characters may even value their cause above their own lives. The good of the cause allows characters to put aside disagreements in favor of a greater good. The downside is that should the cause be undermined, negated or fulfilled — say, for example, a key group belief proves to be false ("The Feds state conclusively on this web site that the Roswell Incident involved nothing more mysterious than a weather balloon! Our belief that the Messengers are Earth's extraterrestrial saviors is wrong!") — the group disintegrates.

In a similar vein, many groups come together as a temporary means of achieving a specific objective. Such imbued may band together for mutual defense in the face of a clear threat, or they have a specific mission that requires teamwork. These are quick and easy ways to get people to cooperate, but because such a group is so loose, all dissent must be handled diplomatically and hunters in such a group might not be prepared to risk themselves to aid their colleagues. Once the objective is attained, such groups typically dissolve.

Shared trauma is less fragile. The World of Darkness is a harsh place, and many terrible things happen in it, especially to hunters. The characters may stay together simply because there is no one else who understands what's happened to them. Most imbued desperately need the company and support of others who have not only suffered the same horrors, but who also realize it. Adversity can produce some very strong interpersonal bonds but doesn't give any real mechanism for settling disputes or making decisions, and it can lead a group to become unusually gloomy. The

death of a character can also affect all others particularly harshly.

A more upbeat version of this motivation is to have a leaderless group united by mutual respect and affection. This type of group can easily grow out of one of the other types as the characters work together, learn to trust one another, rely on each other and so grow close. This pattern is one often found in fiction. When it works well, a mutually friendly group can be extremely effective. The weakness, as with a group brought together by trauma, can be a lack of any mechanism for making decisions, so crucial decisions can stretch on for a dangerously long time.

The final set of reasons for groups staying together centers on coercion. In this type of group, the imbued are forced to work together against their personal preferences. Such unions might come about because members have made an oath or other type of binding promise that forces them into a group, or because they've accepted a contract — possibly as a form of paid employment — or because they have accepted a higher authority, whether spiritual, religious or temporal. In all cases, some characters may resent the group, while others might not particularly object to it. Members typically feel little loyalty to one another, and may actively dislike one another, which can make the unit extremely vulnerable. Especially irritated characters might try to find a way to leave or even turn traitor just to get away.

## GROUP DYNAMICS

Whatever the rationale behind your group's continued cooperation, instances when the characters do not or when their objectives clash are sure to arise. Friction is inevitable, particularly when the hunters concerned are strong-willed and dedicated, as are the majority of the imbued. At such times, players must make certain allowances for group dynamics or accept that the game is going to be disrupted repeatedly, which means everyone has less fun.

One of the most important rules to remember is that disagreement is a luxury that you can afford only when nothing important is going on. Arguing takes time, and if your characters are in the midst of a crisis, events are sure to roll over them. Sometimes, even a bad decision is better than no decision at all. So when things are really chaotic, don't waste time trying to come to a decision by consensus. The most effective thing to do is to have a leader who decides what to do, or failing that appoint someone to make a quick group decision and then act on it. After all, you can always fight about it afterward, once the emergency is over.

The value of a strong leader is discussed above, but effective leadership means more than just barking

orders. A good leader spends time keeping the group working together effectively, and that includes making sure that other imbued are as happy as possible, listening to what the group has to say, and having a reliable way of reaching decisions before crises hit. The leader may also have to hide information from certain group members on occasion in the interests of getting things done. If the group needs to make a deal with a repentant monster, for example, certain atrocious things the creature did in the past may be best kept secret from a group's zealous Avenger. Leaders and groups who engage in such practices should be prepared for some interesting internal conflict, however, when the Storyteller rules that such subterfuge fails and the monster is out of the bag.

Healthy groups with a strong leader often feature another important group player, the jester. This character lightly mocks the leader's information, logic, qualifications or even intelligence and appearance. The jester is an important reminder to the leader to be certain that her decisions are as accurate as possible, and that she has considered all the options and possibilities and not missed anything obvious. If the entire group tends to defer automatically to the leader, tunnel vision is sure to develop, leading to dangerous assumptions and bad planning.

## INCLUSIVE PLAYING

The most important thing to remember is that playing *Hunter* is supposed to be a fun. Every player has a duty to make sure that everyone else is included in the game, and that no one is sidelined. When a group of characters differs widely as individuals, making sure that the group includes everyone while still allowing characters to retain their own uniqueness can be difficult. If you have to erase all free will from your character, the game stops being fun. That means charting a middle course between obedience to the group and constant in-fighting, so that the various hunters all remain more or less content with the way the group runs, and the players can all have a good time. Luckily, doing so is not difficult, and you'll find it to be well worth the effort.

The best way for any group with a broad variety of characters to be efficient *and* inclusive is to give different people different roles and areas of authority. The best leaders delegate, and the best groups include people who have clearly defined areas of expertise. The first step is to give everyone a specific role during combat or other life-and-death situations. Determine what strengths characters have. Apart from obvious roles in a fight situation such as close combat, ranged combat or thrown weapons, a sensible group ought to have someone who can perform emergency medical services, someone who

can look for and clear an escape route, someone who can provide a distraction, and even someone who can go into a dangerous area and bring fallen comrades to the medic. If everyone has an assigned role and a routine to perform, everyone feels included during combat, not just the fighters. Remember to weigh Traits and edges as well as creeds when deciding who should do what.

Everyone ought to have a particular area of authority outside combat, too. Whether based on personality, Abilities, Backgrounds, or even experience, these "character wrinkles" are essential to keeping the hunt from becoming a mere "bug hunt." Each member of the group should make decisions on ideas, planning and execution of events and other matters covered by her area. Areas of authority can range from transport, tactics and building things to finance, dealing with police (i.e., avoiding them altogether) and running cons. Rely on the Storyteller to involve all the players by bringing the different areas of authority into the game regularly, and feel free to assign more than one area of authority so long as everyone gets a fair share. Don't give any particular character absolute authority on the core matters of the hunt, though — which monsters to act against, which are worth trying to save — or else the other players, and hunters, may well become resentful.

For big decisions when there is time to think, try to make sure everyone is involved. Even if one person — a leader or expert — has the last say, everyone in the group should at least be consulted. That way, all the characters feel they are listened to and included, and the players can have fun.

Disagreements that cannot be settled through character debate can be resolved in a variety of ways. One, as mentioned earlier, is for the group leader to impose a decision on the group. When a decision falls specifically within one character's area of authority or expertise, he too can be given the right to reach a final verdict, much like a sports referee. If no clear expert is present, however, then another good option is to have a rolling decision. With this method, each character takes a turn at being the person to make the final decision, according to a strict order. Other characters may disagree, but they have to wait their turn. This method offers a very fair way of dealing with disputes but does not always yield the best solutions.

Another option is to put a decision to a group vote. Whichever option has the greatest number of votes wins. This method is also extremely fair, but if one or two characters hold views different from the others', they might never get decisions that go their way, which would leave them highly dissatisfied. A fourth

option is to haggle over a decision, offering future concessions, services or goods in return for agreement at the present time, much as politicians do. This process can be entertaining and imposes a significant degree of responsibility on the winner.

When all else fails, if a character disagrees vehemently with a particular course of action, it may be necessary to give that person some other task to do that takes him out of the way while the rest of the group does what has to be done. In some cases, sending the difficult character on a side-mission before he knows about the other issue might be crucial to success. This sort of manipulation needs to be handled sensitively and maturely by the players — never feel any need to get angry with your friends just because your character would be pissed at her fellows. Never forget that *Hunter* is just a game. That rule is, perhaps, the most important of all when trying to make sure that a group works together. As a player, remember that the other players are your friends, and cut their characters — and the Storyteller — some slack. Doing so goes a long way toward making sure that everyone has a good time, and if people aren't having a good time, they're likely to stop playing and you might be left without a game.

## TEAMWORK

Having a set of systems or dynamics that allow your characters to work together with the minimum amount of stress really pays off when they're on the hunt. If they can get along, the different creeds can work extremely well together, and their skills and perspectives complement one another quite effectively. Your characters' personal outlooks, understandings and opinions can be combined to make your group far stronger than the sum of its parts. In this last section, we look at each of the creeds in turn to consider the generalized strengths and weaknesses of each, and what can be done to get the most out of them. We don't discuss the tactical aspects of different edge combinations, though — part of the fun of playing a group with a wide range of creeds is finding out for yourself how things work well together.

The biggest problem with a group having a restricted range of creeds — particularly single-creed groups — is lack of perspective. The hunt is a subtle and tricky undertaking, and different situations require radically different approaches. Learning to identify the correct approach to resolve a specific situation is one of the most important skills that a hunter group can develop. Sometimes, charging in with guns drawn really is the best option — but other times it can get all your characters killed. A group of imbued with a narrow range of creeds tends to come up

with the same type of answer to the majority of problems, and that's a serious weakness when dealing with something as complex as the World of Darkness. In *Hunter*, you need a breadth of ideas if you're going to succeed in the long run.

Looking at the spread of primary Virtues across a group gives you a quick overview of whether your team tends more toward specialization or balance. The type of group you have is sure to shape the sort of game you find yourself in. If your group has a lot more Zealous imbued than any other kind, yours is likely to be a fairly direct, action-oriented game. You probably don't spend much time getting familiar with the secret workings of the world, or befriending any supernatural beings. Instead, your primary reactions are likely to be either fight or get out of the way. Monsters that discover your group probably try to either stay hidden or do what they can to neutralize you.

If the group consists mostly of Merciful hunters, your focus is likely to be just the opposite. Your characters probably seek information about the local supernatural creatures, evaluate them and maybe even try to uncover secrets about how they're organized — to better understand what they go through and feel as creatures. You might even get drawn into plots by the creatures around you.

Groups that are mostly Visionary are likely to spend the bulk of their time on research and investigation, and are as likely to tour the country interviewing other hunters as they are to focus on eradicating or converting monsters. Balanced groups tend to indulge in all these activities at various times, of course.

Avengers are usually direct and to the point, and they often dislike delays, drawn-out plans and sneakiness. The majority of them have a problem with any form of reconciliation with monsters. They can be pretty stubborn about it, so a good group dynamic is important. They're brave and determined, good in a fight, reliable and, for the most part, honorable. Most of them are quite practical and tend to have useful Resources, Skills or worldly authority if you need to get something physical done. They find it easier to cope with negotiation if they know that it's sure to lead to an attack on a more unpleasant target, or it otherwise clearly advances the cause of humanity. They can work well in good-cop, bad-cop negotiations as "bad cops," and because they don't trust monsters, they can be excellent to have as observers during negotiations, looking out for lies, inconsistencies, ambush or other traps.

Defenders are less concerned about taking the fight to the enemy. They prefer territory that they are familiar with and may get edgy when they don't know escape routes and fallback positions. They're pragmatic about reaching agreements that postpone

violence or make it more effective, and they're relatively happy to work on medium-term plans. They are less pleased about situations that put group members or loved ones in danger. Often useful as organizers and sources of information, they can be trusted to arrange things and keep projects running. They are particularly useful in a support role in combat to keep an eye on its overall flow, and to direct strategy. Of course, they might be over-cautious.

Judges like to deal in clearly defined situations. Because they place so much emphasis on evaluation and decision-making, they can find it hard to accept that some complex circumstances require extremely flexible approaches. They can be arrogant and inflexible, and thus can find it difficult to accept that their decisions might be the wrong ones. Their talents lie in finding answers, assessing situations and creatures, and making impartial judgments, so they're good at looking for background information, working out what's going on and making deals. In combat, they make good participants and excellent planners because they're skilled at assessing threat levels.

Innocents are most concerned that people do the right thing by each other. They tend to be both moral and ethical, and they try to apply their sense of honor and fairness to every situation. They have an uncomfortable knack for reminding people of the negative effects of their actions, and serve as the voice of conscience. They can make an invaluable contribution to plans and schemes because they are able to remind other hunters of the legality and righteousness of their goals and methods. Innocents often have enough sensitivity to understand the motivations of even the least-humane creature. They also tend to be great interviewers and spokespersons for a group, because they are sociable and empathetic. They are less well-suited to tactical combat planning, but they will determinedly take part in an assault against a monster that they understand to be truly evil and destructive.

Martyrs generally feel a strong need to atone for something, often through personal privation and self-sacrifice. They are brave to the point of foolhardiness, eager to volunteer for unpleasant or dangerous tasks, and excellent at jobs that require stamina, patience and tolerance or discomfort, such as stake-outs, undercover work or break-ins. Some are keen to get into combat or other dangerous situations, but their enthusiasm can be greater than their ability. Because they tend toward personal melodrama and pessimism, they are not always reliable for planning or interaction.

Redeemers, like Avengers, tend to have strong views on the ethics and morals of the hunt and cling to them stubbornly. Because working to save a crea-

ture takes time and research, they quickly acquire patience, determination and a methodical outlook. That makes them excellent information gatherers and primary researchers. They usually represent a monster's interests in discussions and provide excellent insights into the sympathetic side of creatures. Redeemers can be very effective in combat if convinced that it's necessary, and some of them also have vitally important medical skills.

Visionaries ask questions. They often find no answers are available, but the question alone may stimulate productive thought. They often know more about the hunt itself than do other creeds, and they keep one eye on long-term goals, both of which mean that they often seem to have an odd view of events in the present. They are insightful and intuitive, excellent analysts, planners and armchair detectives, and can be extremely inspirational. They aren't necessarily much good at getting tasks done or at dealing with the public. Visionaries often come across as distracted, arrogant or peculiar. Although they are good at assessing a situation or creature, they're not always much use in combat.

Both Hermits and Waywards are difficult to work with, and a player with a character from either of these creeds definitely needs to be moderate in her application of her character's derangements. Hermits are extremely skilled at gathering and passing information and communications, and they often get vital warnings and messages from the Heralds. They experience a great deal of discomfort around other imbued, however, stemming from the constant howl of Herald-fed clamor. That makes them abrupt and often actively unpleasant. They may know incredibly detailed information — far too detailed to be of any use. Their grasp on sanity is shaky at best, and they may become delusional. They tend to shy away from combat. When in a group of players' characters, they tend to hang back during interaction with outsiders, but probably can participate fully apart from that.

Waywards, on the other hand, are highly skilled killers with excellent combat abilities and the experience to strengthen any fighting group. Unfortunately, they are also largely amoral and lack any sense of perspective or appropriate action. Their only interest is in the destruction of monsters, regardless of the defenseless people — or colleagues — killed in the process. They may react badly to any hunter who suggests anything other than an attack or surveillance leading up to an attack. As a player's character, a Wayward must be kept firmly in check during times when all-out violence is not appropriate. Emotional dependency on another character is one way to anchor such a character: A sympathetic healer whom the Wayward recognizes as his last bridge to humanity or

a dependable leader who takes a fatherlike role in saying when actions are appropriate or not might work. These figures might use blackmail ("Do anything to her and we'll tell the police where to find you") or simple, physical threats — a language any Wayward is sure to understand. Probably better than other imbued, so caution is the best guide here.

## MONSTERS IN OUR LIVES

Candace shifted uncomfortably on the bar stool. Where is that little shit? she thought. She had already been waiting an hour for the bloodsucker. Several times she'd considered getting up, walking away and forgetting she ever knew this... thing. If he hadn't been so helpful recently, she would never have agreed to this meeting.

That's what she kept telling herself, anyway.

"Mind if I sit here?"

Candace flinched at the sound of the familiar voice and turned quickly to look "Mike" in the eye. She let the second sight fill her and saw his sunken, cadaverous cheeks, met his hungry, feral gaze. That was enough to confirm what she already knew, what he'd told her himself by phone weeks ago when he became her informant about who really ran the city. Candace let go of the power, and she was glad to see the brief flash of his true features fade. She nodded toward the adjacent stool, and he sat.

"Here's the lowdown on Marrick, just like I promised. He handles prostitution, hard drugs and just about anything else he can sink his claws into." He tossed a manila envelope onto the bar. "This is everything on where he eats, sleeps and hangs his 'Mister Big' hat."

Candace nodded again, picked up the envelope and pocketed it. "Thanks," she said, but to her it sounded as if a toddler had spoken the word. She cleared her throat and continued. "Look, I know you're taking a huge risk bringing me this stuff. I'm grateful, really. But what do you want out of all this?"

"I want you to stop messing with us. I don't want you to get hurt, Sis."

"Don't call me that," she said through clenched teeth, keeping her voice low. "You're not my brother. My brother's dead, just like you said on the phone."

Not wanting him to see the tears welling in her eyes, she looked away. Immediately, she worried about having her back to one of them. She hated to think of him that way, though, and turned to face him again. "Mike—"

She saw his back as he exited the bar.

"Hey lady, you okay?" the bartender asked. "You look like you seen a ghost."

"Something like that," Candace said, still staring toward the door.

Hunters face a menagerie of nightmare creatures that exist only to bring harm to humanity, that can't be reasoned with and that want nothing more to do with



any imbued beyond tipping out her entrails. In response, the imbued load up with heavy weapons and prepare to make *From Dusk Till Dawn* look like a Sunday school class. Right?

Wrong, on all counts.

First, monsters whom the imbued routinely face were once human, and they often retain capacity for reason, as well as their own goals, interests and needs. Second, the Messengers do not exclusively select candidates who are disposed toward violence, nor do they typically instill such a disposition through the imbuing. Not even Avengers are *required* to grab a shotgun and start blasting zombie innards all over the street.

The reasons a monster and a hunter might choose to cooperate are legion. Consider Candace and Mike in the preceding fiction. As siblings, they shared relatives, a past and, clearly, strong feelings — presumably feelings of love. But Candace, with her ability to see monsters for what they are, sees Mike as more than just the sum of those commonalities and yet less than her kin. Her feelings are complicated, as emotions about family can be; Candace's part in the hunt complicates her feelings more than usual. Mike is willing to assist her, but within limits. She knows things are more complex than some imbued want to believe. At the same time, she knows that Mike's existence requires him to prey on others. That knowledge, in turn, preys on Candace. At some time in the

future, she may feel more troubled by that fact than she feels bolstered by any help toward her goals that Mike might lend. For now, he is an ally who evokes strong, mixed emotions in her.

Like the one between Mike and Candace, any relationship between imbued and "enemy" that goes beyond mutual target practice ought to encompass more than one element. At the very least, any monster capable of reasoning has to have his own motivations in such a relationship. Those feelings are the province of the Storyteller, though. Here, our interest is in what could motivate a hunter to risk betrayal by monsters, censure from other imbued, and various ethical compromises (depending on the individual's approach to the hunt) to cooperate with the other side.

Keep in mind, though, that just as nobody is one thing, neither is any relationship between two individuals.

### THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND

Or at least an ally of convenience. A ghost or rot whose death came at the hands of the characters' current nemesis can serve as a useful partner with common cause. The ghost might have information about those nasty sorcerers that can help turn the tide in the hunters' favor if applied in a timely fashion. One vampire holding a grudge against another who took him into the ranks of the undead can prove invaluable.

Such an alliance can be one of happenstance if the imbued meet all the supernaturals in question in the course of their own conflict. It can also be an extension of a living relationship. If the old man who runs the occult bookstore where the characters do much of their research is murdered by a supernatural creature, his ghost might turn to the characters for help (once he realizes they can offer it). The ghost of a character's former spouse could fill a similar and long-term role in a chronicle. The ghostly spouse could serve as a means to interact with the supernatural without violent confrontation, to highlight exactly what the characters are fighting for (or to define what they *believe* they're fighting for) and help them understand their place in the World of Darkness.

One disadvantage of dealing with monsters is that occasion when the monster decides to use the characters as tools or weapons. Characters who choose to work with a monster should be careful that they don't end up merely fulfilling some creature's whims and creating a stronger enemy for themselves. A clever vampire need not use mind control to get what he wants, and an imbued with active sight is not immune to mundane forms of manipulation. Even a seemingly trustworthy or sympathetic supernatural creature should probably generate some wariness in characters. If a cunning vampire catches on to the characters' activities, she could just as easily aim them at her rivals as she could try to kill them. The former situation makes a more compelling story in the long run, especially once the characters become inconvenient for the vampire or discover her motivations and try to take matters into their own hands.

## SALVATION

This one's easy: The characters find a monster who doesn't like his state and wants to atone for his sins in some way. Alternatively, the characters might *convince* a monster to atone. Should others of his kind discover his change of heart, they'll seek to change it back, or to destroy him to keep him from endangering *their* existence. In such an event, he might need protection from the characters. Hunters can have numerous reasons to help a monster salvage herself. Perhaps she comes to them, looking for assistance. Perhaps the characters see a compassionate side to her that they hadn't expected. Would they want to nurture that trait? If not, why not?

This subject is a hard one to handle without falling into clichés, but if handled well, it can be rewarding. A vampire who wants salvation or forgiveness for the wrongs he has committed is unlikely to decide to hunt down "evil" vampires (whatever that means) or some similar nonsense, but he might try to convert others to his newfound way of thinking or simply try to hide

from them. Maybe he seeks death at the hands of the characters — whether they want to kill him or not. Or maybe only *some* of the hunters are willing to give the monster the end he seeks. The imbued, after all, are far from unified in their views on the hunt.

## LOVE

Affection is tricky. One of the characters loves someone who happens to be one of the supernatural. He can be a shapeshifter, a ghost, a bloodsucker — among others — each of which has its own consequences and problems. A vampire's notion of the "night life" is altogether different, a ghost lacks a body (giving a whole new meaning to "I love him for his mind") and the average were-thing is prone to genuinely devastating fits of temper. Love may transcend all boundaries, but such a relationship can quickly turn very inconvenient for either party (or both) as other imbued or supernaturals discover it — and someone will discover it, eventually.

Romantic love makes fools of us all and nobody more so than individuals driven to the extremely dangerous activity of hunting the probably lethal (and thus ill-advised) object of one's affections or her ilk. The love could predate either the character's imbuing or the monster's passage into the supernatural. This approach can be especially effective with spouses or siblings, as seen with Mike and Candace. Either way, this should be a twist that the player puts into his character's origins or at least has hooks that could *become* a twist. Say, Danny the Avenger hunts the undead because they killed his wife and daughter. What does he do when he finds that his wife isn't dead, but is one of *them*? And that she still loves him? What if she returns in a body that's not her own? Does he try to kill her mercifully or does he try to help her? Should Danny decide to destroy a member of his family, chances are he'll go through a lot of soul-searching first, and the act itself is sure to leave him seriously traumatized. Very few people can just abandon emotional ties, no matter what the reason.

## BETRAYAL

For purposes of double-dealing, characters seek a monster they can cultivate for information or assistance, only to "kill him last." This tactic is really not very nice, but when you fight evil you sometimes have to do unpleasant things. Betrayal tends to be more easily planned than executed, however, especially when complications arise (real friendship, love, anything that tugs the characters' heart strings).

A more strife-ridden possibility, hinted at above, is that some of the characters honestly want to maintain friendly relations with a supernatural, while

others plot a backstabbing (and possibly use the unsuspecting characters as bait). This tack naturally leads to some intense conflict among the hunters and may result in a split over beliefs and preferences. The conflict could easily escalate to one side or the other getting branded on hunter-net as sympathizers or worse. Characters should be careful about whom they're willing to alienate, but sometimes the hunt demands action.

Keep mixed feelings in mind. Even individuals who engineer a betrayal may find the follow-through to be harder than they expected. Perhaps after setting the bait and getting a bite, one of the conspirators begins to see the qualities in the monster that another imbued perceived long before. Alternatively, the hunter who befriends a supernatural creature might have opportunity that her colleagues lack to see a subtly, dangerously alien side of her "ally." Does she share the revelation? If not, is she relieved when the others take down her friend? And if she's relieved, how long does it take for guilt to set in?

## WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION?

Until now, this article has discussed situations that might bring hunters in contact with the "enemy." Easily as important is what hunters feel in such encounters. Certainly, working such ideas for imbued-monster interaction into your character's initial concept is one approach to creating him. After all, part of the fun of **Hunter** is the discovery of the supernatural world and deciding how different people might relate to it. The creeds are all based on general attitudes toward right and wrong, with wide latitude for individual characters. A hunter is someone confronted by something that ought not exist but does, and that something is ineluctably wrong in the view of the individual imbued. Creed, however, doesn't define personality. A character defined entirely by his creed would be a shallow fellow indeed.

Thus, considerations of why should go beyond simple lists of friends or relatives who have joined the ranks of monsters, or who might do so later. They should spring from who the character is. A character who views supernatural creatures as victims of circumstance might be willing to try to empathize with a monster and deal with it as a person — albeit a person with a serious problem.

Consider the following questions when creating a character:

- What's her first reaction when she encounters a monster? Ponder this one carefully, as it defines her basic attitude toward the supernatural. One imbued might hold back and watch, waiting for the opportunity to strike. Another imbued might

try to understand the monster: Why does it behave as it does? What motivates it? Does it retain any human qualities?

- What if the monster is a friend or family member? An imbued who would thrust a stake into a bloodsucker's heart without hesitation might not be so decisive if that bloodsucker is (or was) a close friend or lover. If the character is willing to entertain second thoughts when dealing with people he knows, why does he treat them differently than othersupernaturals? Does his attitude toward monsters in general change after he sees someone he knows and loves among their ranks? Does it steel his resolve and encourage him to fight harder to avenge what's been done to his loved ones? Does it temper his desire for justice into a less judgmental response?

- Does the sort of monster make a difference? This one is a little more complex and might take time to work through. Is the character more willing to give the benefit of the doubt to a ghost than to a rot, or a rot over a bloodsucker? Why? What is it about ghosts that makes her more willing to deal with them than with a walking, talking corpse? As her experiences with monsters mount, do her pre-conceptions change, or does she cling to preferred beliefs? **Hunter** characters are thrown into a traumatic situation — sudden revelation that the world is not as it seems. Further exploration can reveal varied layers to this reality. How do a character's own beliefs stand up to her shifting perceptions of this "secret world?"

- What would drive the character to change allegiance? This question is a tough one to ask. In essence, it's "What will make my character betray what he believes in most?" What could possibly happen that would convince him to work with monsters rather than against them? How about driving him to work against other imbued rather than with them? Whatever the cause, it should lay at the core of the character's beliefs and personality. A police officer who joined the force because he wanted to make the world a better place is unlikely to work for a rot serial killer just because the rot offered a hefty bribe. Try to consider the sort of event that would literally shatter the character's worldview — beyond the imbuing, that is. Also, consider what would reinforce that view.

- What would your character hope to gain? If she's willing to work with monsters, what does she expect to achieve? Does she want to redeem them? Does she want to use them to find worse monsters? Does she distrust the Messengers' side of the story and seek a balanced perspective? Does she believe there are supernaturals who would join the Messengers' cause if they became aware of it?

When considering the possibility of working (siding, sleeping) with the enemy, work the reasons into your character. Ask the above questions and any others that would add depth and circumstance to her reasons. Do not toss aside deep motivations for frivolous reasons ("Well, I think the vampire looks sexy in leather, so I thought I'd help him out") when it can and will compromise character integrity. Do not discount the way superficialities can bear on the crucial ("Sorry, I can't inhale around your zombie friend here without wanting to puke"), either. The above questions aren't necessary to the character-creation process, but they can significantly add to a *Hunter* chronicle if answered in detail.

## WHO'S THE REAL MONSTER HERE?

Nietzsche wrote, roughly, "Be careful that in fighting monsters, one does not also become a monster." This caveat is true literally and figuratively for imbued characters, who probably have good reason to deal violently with most creatures they meet.

But should they?

Humans are as capable of heinous acts as many a supernatural creature, and monsters can rise above their impulses to pursue a better existence (and perhaps to behave more humanely than many people do), whether or not success is possible in the long run. Imbued who kill and kill and kill again without care for what their targets are like or how they behave are sure to run afoul of something that can and will kill them. And really, can an imbued person who chooses only to kill that which he doesn't (yet) understand be any better than the beasts he destroys? Of course, growing too sympathetic with the enemy can impair one's ability to fight when the time comes. This conflict has no easy solution.

Characters who look for options apart from destruction have more opportunity for depth and roleplaying than those who think only to kill. If any monster is a potential ally (or at least not an enemy), characters gain breathing space to find any real threats.

What a monster is and what a monster does are two different — yet sometimes related — aspects of its existence. Some monsters must commit monstrous acts to survive. Others act in a monstrous fashion out of choice. Some do both.

Consider the following: An Avenger sees a zombie attack a known murderer. Does the Avenger help the human or does he help the zombie? After all, he knows the human has committed heinous acts to satisfy his particular cravings, perhaps crimes more extreme than the zombie's. Some Avengers would attack the creature for simply targeting a person. But if that zombie had been the murderer's victim, is her cause as justifiable as any hunter's? What if the Avenger helps the

### STORYTELLER NOTE

**Hunter** is, at heart, a game about struggles with monsters. The existence of sympathetic monsters in a chronicle can offer a lot of depth and great potential for roleplaying in the short and long term. Such elements work best if they have contrast with other monsters. Thus, it's best to keep monstrous allies at a minimum. Otherwise, their presence loses its impact.

murderer, who goes on to kill again? What if the human is another imbued known to the character, but was in the process of burning down an apartment complex to kill one rot?

**Hunter** offers an excellent chance to examine and contrast what monsters are versus what monsters do. A player who explores more facets than "Investigate the monster, kick in his door, kill him and loot his house" can find some rich veins of roleplaying potential.

## THE CREDENTS

Members of each creed have different takes on cutting deals with the enemy. From reading **Hunter**, it's easy to conclude that only the Innocents or Redeemers have good reason to talk first, but a member of any creed has potential. The following are starting points at best. None are definitive, and it's probable that any imbued who does ally with the supernatural does so for personal reasons stronger than creed alone suggests. Even so, creed can subtly or overtly shade interactions of the imbued.

### AVENGERS

Seeing Avengers as ultraviolent protagonists whose only interest in monsters is the amount of ammo needed to kill them is easy, two-dimensional and limited. As with any imbued, an Avenger is a person granted ability to see the hidden world and its denizens. True, Avengers view the typical monster as something better off dead, but Avengers are neither stupid nor unwilling to ignore opportunity when it arises.

An Avenger could have a multitude of reasons for allying with a monster on a temporary or even permanent basis. The reasons discussed above are certainly the most common, if not always the most compelling. In truth, if given a choice between killing a zombie immediately or recruiting it to help kill something worse, some Avengers would certainly choose the latter. Sometimes, the devil you know is better than the devil you don't.

Not all Avengers take kindly to other imbued who are willing to consort with monsters, especially ones who ally with the enemy on a regular basis. It's far too

easy to fall under their "corrupting" influence and lose track of the reason for the imbuing. Avengers who feel strongly about such things refer to imbued who deal with monsters as "traitors" or worse. Few Avengers would discuss their amicable experiences with monsters for that reason alone.

#### DEFENDERS

Defenders act out of a need to protect something — whether family, friends or a locale. Sometimes, those charges happen to be *monsters*. Protecting monsters from what they bring upon themselves is seen as a dangerous mistake among many imbued. Creatures — even those that also happen to be loved ones — can turn on anyone. A Defender plays with fire to place her trust in such beings. Or, so more militant imbued would insist: Monsters are as monsters do. Thoughtful Defenders point out that imbued are likewise capable of turning on their own. Standing up for something is always risky, they say, especially for hunters.

Some creatures have goals that are compatible with the Defender perspective. For instance, some ghosts stay behind to guard something or someone of value to them. Some vampires covertly watch over and occasionally protect their mortal descendants. How does a Defender deal with the ghost of his grandfather, whom he's discovered has protected the family for two generations? Eliminating someone or something that is not a threat and is sometimes a great help can be hard to justify. Alternatively, learning that her 80-something grandfather has been a vampire for 50 years may not be comforting to the Defender, but does that mean the bloodsucking octogenarian should be destroyed? If the grandfather is trying to atone for past crimes or simply to protect his family out of a sense of obligation, the Defender who wants to kill him simply for being one of the undead faces a tough choice. The fact that, despite Grampa's good intentions, he must drink blood to survive is sure to factor strongly into the Defender's decision.

#### INNOCENTS

Most imbued who think in stereotypical terms probably believe that any given Innocent is just looking for a chance to make peace with monsters and "try to get along." This notion falls far short of the truth. What an Innocent is likely to do is to try to look at monsters as more than a set of fangs, scary powers and B.O. from the grave. An Innocent wants to know what she's dealing with before she decides that it needs to die. Some monsters, she finds, do need killing, but she doesn't want to make that decision without knowing why it's necessary.

An Innocent in doubt about a monster's deserved fate could very easily end up associating with the

monster to "get to know him." Such a relationship can be productive through helping the Innocent and her fellows by diminishing their ignorance about the supernatural — maybe. Of course, the hunt comes into it at some point — an imbued of the Innocent's acquaintance targets her newfound friend, or she discovers that a creature's humane exterior covers awful depths. Perhaps the Innocent hopes to use her relationship to show the monster that a "better way" exists, through example if nothing else.

One possibility is that the Innocent sees the monster caught in the wheels of another's plots and tries to show him that he doesn't have to participate — and that he can, in fact, help prevent those plots. Many a powerful rot has weaker pawns who do much of his work for him. Convincing the pawns to turn against their former master is certainly a valid hunting tactic — as long as the hunter doesn't grow too sympathetic with the monsters.

#### JUDGES

A Judge is careful on the hunt — he has to be. His mistakes often can't be undone. If he kills an undeserving creature, he can't bring her back. Few monsters can be considered "harmless" in most senses of the word, but what if she's not harmful *enough*? Sometimes, a Judge has to choose between two or more evils, and when it comes right down to it, letting the lesser evil survive is often the best choice. The hunt itself *probably* defines any relationship a Judge has with a monster, assuming something else (like love or an old friendship) doesn't complicate matters.

Judges are less likely to give a monster the benefit of the doubt the way an Innocent might. No matter how well he knows a monster or for how long, the fact that she's a *monster* is his primary concern. If she works with the Judge today, that doesn't mean she won't betray him tomorrow. Worse, he might betray a creature only to learn afterward that she was his staunchest ally.

Judges hate to second-guess themselves, and working with the enemy can feel like wandering a maze while blindfolded. Every night that a Judge lets that one monster go is a night that monster can do things that warrant its destruction. And the Judge feels responsible because he didn't act sooner. Of course, if the monster *hasn't* done anything, who's to say that she will in the future? Can you punish someone — even the undead — for crimes she hasn't committed?

#### MARTYRS

A Martyr's relationship with monsters can be confusing for imbued who don't share her perspective. The Martyr's willingness to sacrifice to help others can lead her into interactions with monsters that don't involve the application of holy water,

stakes or incendiary edges. If she feels it necessary, she'll do anything to help anyone, even a monster. This drive may stem from a need to set an example — to show people and monsters that there *are* better ways to do things. A Martyr may make sacrifices *especially* if a monster benefits, since her existence since the imbuing is unavoidably intertwined with those of the monsters around her. Would she be willing to offer her own blood to a vampire so he need not stalk and assault others for their blood? Of course, if she makes the offer she probably does so in exchange for the vampire's assistance in the hunt.

A Martyr is not naïve enough to believe that *any* monster has her best interests at heart, but she understands that one must often suffer for even the smallest of victories. And a monster who works *with* you is one fewer monster working *against* you.

#### REDEEMERS

Arguably, a Redeemer is all about working with monsters, at least in a way. It's not that he wants to befriend every ghost, rot or zombie that comes his way. Or that he believes the best about them. Rather, the Redeemer is willing to look at monsters as individuals who were *once* human and consider them on those terms. A monster who seeks salvation or tries to rise above his condition can possibly find a sympathetic ear in a Redeemer. The pardoner, for his part, may see it as similar to helping a terminal patient accept her condition, or he might even think he can help a monster regain her lost humanity. After all, characters in *Hunter* really don't know much about what they're called upon to face, or the likelihood of any particular tactic working or failing.

#### VISIONARIES

Visionaries try to understand what's happening — who chose them, why are actions necessary, and do the imbued act without sufficient forethought? A Visionary might decide that monsters warrant greater understanding, and how better to understand them than to get to know one? Of course, no single monster is representative, but if even *one* still retains enough of his former humanity for others to see, how many others also do? Is it right to kill all creatures if some show signs of being other than simply monstrous?

Also, through understanding monsters, one might possibly understand the imbued. At least some monsters were once human, but through some action (death, conversion) they've been altered supernaturally. The imbued are human, but through some action (the Messengers), they too have gained *otherness*. Certainly, despite their powers, most hunters are sure to think, "We're still the same people we were

before the world changed, right?" Still, just how thick is the division between imbued and monster? Be careful — a hunter who follows that line of questioning too far may end up undermining her own belief in the hunt and herself.

#### FALLOUT

When the imbued make alliances with the enemy, the consequences are often not pretty. Other imbued probably won't care about or understand the reasons for any bond, and they may decide to kill an errant imbued along with her supernatural friend(s). Thus, many imbued keep any friendly interaction they have with monsters to themselves. Among some like-minded hunters, it's more acceptable to discuss the matter (if only in theoretical terms), but even among Redeemers it's not hard to find individuals who are opposed to *any* traffic with the supernatural.

Things can get very ugly very quickly when a hunter has to choose between another imbued and a close friend who happens to be dead. Even worse if the imbued is also a friend, as well as an ally. If the monster happens to be crucial to dealing with even worse monsters, another hunter's effort to kill an important, inhuman ally can force an imbued to the unthinkable: Killing one of his own. Certainly, it might be possible to simply restrain her in some way (drug her, lock her up), but with some edges, nonlethal countermeasures are unlikely to work. If it's *Convince her that what she's doing may damage the cause of the imbued (whatever that is...)*, or she attacks right now and the time for talk is over, what happens next? Murder is the worst of several very bad options, but it may also be the only one.

Even if a character manages to resolve the immediate situation without killing a fellow hunter, what does he do if his erstwhile fellow shares news of his association with monsters on hunter-net?

Is it better to kill the monster and preserve a reputation or kill the reputation and preserve a monster? What about conscience? An alliance with monsters is likely to turn out badly no matter how it's handled. Regardless of the outcome, working through interactions can lead to powerful and interesting roleplaying. It's easy to put down a monster uncaringly if it lacks a human face or has only a false one. Once creatures are seen to possess personalities and goals that are comprehensible to a human, it's harder to act without consideration — or, after the fact, remorse.

#### THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

This last point about relations with the enemy is nevertheless the most important one: Never tell them *what you are*. This area is one in which the

imbued are strongly encouraged to learn from the other side's tricks. The general populace is unaware of the existence of rots, ghosts, vampires, werewolves, witches and whatever the hell else dwells in the shadows. This lack of knowledge endures for a very good reason — monsters hide. They expend a great deal of effort keeping the truth out of the world's perception.

This wisdom works both ways. No matter how much a character likes or trusts his vampire buddy, he should never reveal what he is to his ally. Even the newest vampire who learns about the existence of a growing number of humans with unusual abilities that can ferret out monsters probably will take that

#### NOTE TO STORYTELLERS: THE OTHER SIDE

Secrecy goes both ways. Just because a vampire has found an understanding friend in a hunter doesn't mean that he'll reveal all the details of his existence to her, or that of the greater "society" of vampires. Just as a hunter's revelation can bring unwanted attention from vampires, a vampire's indiscretion could bring unwanted attention from hunters — or worse, the general mortal populace. Admittedly, most monsters won't survive to see the fallout from their mistakes — their respective societies have draconian rules enforced without exception against revelation to beings "outside the club."

A large part of *Hunter*'s mood centers on the fact that the characters are uninformed about what they're dealing with. They don't necessarily know that there's a distinction between rots and vampires, or that silver bullets won't kill the undead. Even less chance exists that they know about such things as the Technocracy or the Camarilla. When characters deal with monsters, keep supernatural infrastructures shrouded in mystery. Warp and twist them out of shape until they barely resemble what any player can find in *Vampire* or *Mage*, and be stingy with every clue or nugget of information.

When revealing the enemy's secrets to characters, be careful and be crafty. Much of it can be false or simply incomprehensible, depending upon context. After all, a vampire is likely to encourage mortals to believe that ineffective measures *will* work. So much the better if things go sour. On the other hand, don't contradict what is *known to be true*. If characters discover for a fact that vampires in their game don't really burn up in the sun, don't hinge a vampire's defeat upon that weakness.

Play fair, but don't let the characters learn too much or learn what they do get too quickly.

information to his elders. The existence of the imbued embodies everything the supernatural hopes to avoid. One careless word can get a hunter into more trouble than he could possibly imagine. Worse, how long will his Conviction stand up to continuous, prolonged probing at the hands of curious supernaturals? What if they resort to torture to get what they want?

Information dropped carelessly can and will move among monsters, spreading faster than anyone might expect. Loose lips can and probably *will* endanger all of the imbued eventually. The war becomes much harder once the enemy knows what to look for and where. Talking too much is literally a matter of life and death. Don't reveal anything about the imbued to the enemy. Ever.

## CHILDREN AS HUNTERS

"Let me out!"

The tiny whimper matched the half-hearted punches Georgia threw against the kitchen cupboard doors. The little girl pushed aside the cans of food sticking into her body, but doing so inside the cramped cupboard didn't accomplish much. Pounding her fists against the doors once more didn't do anything; a sturdy pair of tongs had been slid through the cupboard door handles, effectively barring shut the little compartment.

The odd woman who had locked Georgia inside the cupboard ranted as she rifled through shelves and drawers in search of some hidden item. Eric and Mary, Georgia's parents, had naturally objected to admitting a stranger armed with a sickle into their home. They lay dead on the floor. Georgia didn't know this yet.

Georgia's brother Henry did know, however, as he crouched in hiding behind the kitchen door. The oven was still on, a roast burning inside it. Pushing his back against the door, Henry wiped his eyes of the tears blinding him. Mom and Dad were dead. If he didn't do something, Georgia might be next.

Henry fought through his faint-heartedness and slowly rose to his feet. Pulling the hood of his jacket over his head, he calmly walked past the strange woman, who saw him but didn't pay him any attention. She continued to look for whatever it was she sought. Standing on his tiptoes, Henry whispered to Georgia, "Get away from the doors." She did. Henry grabbed a spray can of cooking oil from the counter and opened the oven door.

The can rattled inside the oven as Henry dove from the kitchen.

Some children spend their days lost in daydreams of brave knights who battle fearsome beasts. But for others, that daydream is all too real. The brave knight never watches his friends torn down while he's helpless to prevent it. A doorman doesn't stop the brave knight

as he chases a monster. And, at the very least, the brave knight gets to grow up before he faces the grand villain. Not so the hunter.

The demographics of hunters are almost impossible to assay, due to the relatively small number of imbued and their dislocated formation. Hunter-net roll calls aside, hunters have no capacity whatsoever to understand how the hunt is going, or who exactly is on their side. Hunter-net itself gives the impression of there being no preteen hunters at all. If any posters are children, they have yet to come forward and say so.

But the Messengers aren't ageist. Anyone, adult or otherwise, who would make a good hunter — for reasons even the imbued themselves don't comprehend — can receive the call. After all, children perhaps epitomize the hunter condition better than any other group. When hunters discuss the feelings of powerlessness, of never being taken seriously, and of never quite understanding everything around them, they would do well to stop and consider the position of a child, who must deal with these feelings even in normal life.

Playing a child can be a challenging experience that both stresses the acting ability to portray a different mindset and the gaming ability to find solutions to problems within a smaller and less capable body. Children can come to the hunt without the prejudices that can accompany maturation. They can show amazing sympathy to a monster, or they can shock with their meanness. The fact that they *can* be imbued betrays a startling impartiality — some might say callousness — on the part of the Messengers in their quest for champions.

Children, in other words, make great story fodder.

## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CHILDREN HUNTERS

So, why would the Messengers choose a child as a hunter? Surely a child is a disadvantage in the hunt. After all, they are physically smaller and weaker, the proverbial victims of confectionery thievery. Often they are less coordinated, and most of the weapons of the hunt are designed for people much larger than most children are; a child firing even a small handgun is going to be thrown backward by recoil, assuming that she can even get a finger around the trigger! In addition, kids are often denied access to "adult" locations such as bars and clubs (and certain amusement park rides), and in many cases, they have knowledge-based limitations (such as literacy). Why waste effort imbuing a child when an adult can clearly serve your purposes so much better?

The answer is simple: Because an adult often doesn't — or can't — serve the Messengers' purposes

any better. If a child is exceptional, and often exceptional in ways adults tend to miss (such as being open-minded, or brave or curious), then the Messengers recruit such a child for those reasons. And even average children possess a number of advantages over adults in the hunt, such as:

- **Plausible Deniability:** The police barge into a room, which is empty save for one dead man and the hunter. No obvious weapons are present. If the hunter is an adult, he's still probably going to jail. But if the hunter is a child, she gets off scot-free, because no one can believe the child is capable of committing the crime. Often, this blindness extends even to monsters. Who do they worry about more, a nervous looking adult who might be concealing a weapon or a child?

- **Edges serve as an Equalizer:** A child's Cleave is exactly the same as an adult's. Even if they have less physical force to put behind it, the Messengers provide the same amount of extra "oomph" to make that swing worthwhile. Also, a child is more likely to use his edges on a regular basis. Kids learn that they can do new stuff all the time. An edge is just one more new thing. An adult, by contrast, yells "Holy shit!" and gets scared of using it.

- **Children are not Moral Philosophers:** An adult might "Hmmm" and "Hahhhh" over whether it's right or wrong to kill (or heal, or whatever) a monster. Worse yet, they may suffer such nagging doubts right before they get the chance to act, which can prove fatal. Children, as a general rule, don't. Children see the world from only one perspective (their own), and they make judgments from there. That doesn't mean they never hesitate, but if they do it will be because of fear, not because of doubt. Given a simple command with a presence of authority, a child between ages of 8 and 11 will often commit even amazingly heinous acts without question.

## CHILD HUNTERS BY VIRTUE

### ZEAL

Zeal seems to be the most common primary Virtue among children. Zealots aren't necessarily simple, but actions that stem from Zeal are composed along simpler lines than those of Mercy or Vision. Likewise, children are not necessarily simple, but they do tend to take things at face value more than adults do. In particular, Defenders are exceedingly common among children, who often have strong protective instincts against threats to their family or friends. Avengers and Judges are slightly less common (especially Judges), but both are as common as they are with adults.

A child Zealot must be careful. Disadvantages of size and capability limit their ability to directly

destroy monsters, and so many find other ways to take the hunt to the other side. Some attempt to remove themselves from actual hunting, either by tricking others to do it for them or by setting brutal and deadly traps. Others find noncombative roles in the hunt, using their low visibility to become scouts and informants for other hunters. No matter which path they take, child Zealots must find indirect paths to their goal. Such plotting is often beyond many youngsters, and mentors to help them hone skills at hunting monsters are in predictably short supply. The mortality rate among child Zealots is as high as that for their adult counterparts.

#### MERCY

Unlike Zeal, Mercy is a concept that most children do not immediately comprehend, but it's ironically perhaps the one they are best suited to administer. The many disadvantages a child has in the hunt are irrelevant to a mission of healing, and many child hunters do take this road. Most of these children belong to the Innocent creed.

The stereotype of the "innocent child" is riddled with holes: Children are not automatically sweet; many can be quite surprisingly violent; and the barrage of information from modern society, their vulnerability to abuse, and the paranoia induced by overprotective parents can all make childhood naïveté fleeting. Nonetheless, the Innocent stance toward monsters lacks many of the ingrained assumptions the other creeds possess, and children are likely to see a monster simply as a monster — rather like seeing a tiger as a big cat — with no moral judgments attached to that label. The Innocent creed probably has a higher percentage of children in its ranks than any other creed.

In contrast, Redeemers are rare among child hunters. A Redeemer begins by seeing a monster as flawed and as needing to be healed. Although children can possess strong caring instincts, few children see something and immediately assume it should be changed. Those youthful Redeemers who do exist are often brought up with very strong standards of right and wrong that presume violence is always unacceptable. In these cases, redemption will most likely have to be on the child's terms, which may be hard to fulfill. Even less common are Martyrs, although the few that exist are case studies in horrific childhoods. A very potent mix of abuse and alienation is required to create at a young age the kind of self-loathing that Martyrs possess.

Children who follow Mercy are often less at risk than Zealots. Children are expected by stereotype to fall into the less threatening role, and a monster is less likely to be spooked by a child walking calmly toward

it than it is by an adult. If a monster does suddenly become violent when a child is near, however, that child probably ends up dead. The wise children of Mercy make regular use of telephones and the Internet for their work, thus protecting themselves and possibly creating a false status of age for themselves.

#### VISION

Followers of Vision are the rarest among hunters as a whole, but among children they are about as common as those of Mercy. Child Visionaries are perhaps only slightly less rare than Defenders and Innocents. Not only do children come to the hunt with original ideas and no preconceptions, but a few simply do not understand that monsters are to be feared. Thus, they exhibit an unmatched curiosity about such unusual creatures. Such children are rare (most children are still terrified by the sight of the walking dead), but a remarkable number of those who do so become imbued.

#### CHILDREN AND LEARNING

Children tend to be quick learners, mostly as a function of having so much to explore and discover. Learning (at all ages) occurs in three ways: adaptation, assimilation and accommodation. Adaptation is the process of changing (either physically or by changing your perspective of) the environment around you. After observing the effects of this change, you either assimilate those effects into what you already know or you change your understanding of the world to accommodate it.

For example: Trapped in the dining room of his home, Larry desperately grabs a piece of silverware and throws it at the wolf-man, who screams in pain. Seeing this reaction, Larry hurls a few more knives (adapting to his environment) and is rewarded with the sight of the wolf-man finally fleeing, thus giving rise to his belief that half-men are hurt by silverware. Later, when facing a similar lizard-man, Larry tries the same strategy, only to find that it only makes the lizard-man angry. Assuming Larry survives the latter encounter, he now has to change his theory to accommodate this new evidence. In contrast, when he throws silver jewelry at another wolf-man and discovers it works, too, he assimilates this new knowledge and further modifies his old theory.

To take this back to roleplaying, try to have your child character explore his world in the same way. Children apply old solutions to new problems, then quickly change those ways of thinking to accommodate new information.



The other paths of Vision are profoundly rare among hunters, and this is true of child hunters as well. Although little can be said about either Wayward or Hermit children as a rule (as you can probably count them, combined, on one hand) a few observations make sense. Wayward children tend to be categorized very differently than adults: Actions that can earn an adult the label "psychotic" get a child treated for attention deficit disorder. Hermit children are unlikely to flee humanity entirely, as they don't have the wherewithal necessary to do so. Instead, they become recluses within their homes, rarely speaking even when spoken to, hiding behind parents in public, and retreating into their bedrooms whenever possible. Even a child's parents might mistake such behavior as being nothing more than signs of intense (perhaps worrisomely so) shyness.

Child Visionaries follow their path as much as any other Visionary does: by their own rules. An odd preoccupation for many child Visionaries is not "What are monsters?" but "What do monsters do?" Children spend much less time wondering what things are (a monster is just that, a monster), but do spend much time wondering what things do. Why are there monsters? What is their role in the world? These are the questions children of Vision ask.

### HOW A CHILD THINKS (AND TIPS FOR PLAYING ONE)

Children think differently than adults. Their senses are different, and they perceive the world in vastly different ways from how an older person does, or even other children of different ages do. Jean Piaget, a child psychologist, looked particularly at the issues of cognition among children. He found that children's mental development moved through four distinct stages: Sensory-Motor stage (0-2), Preoperational stage (2-7), Concrete Operational stage (8-11) and Formal Operational stage (11-16). As it's unlikely anyone reading this will have a burning desire to play a hunter less than two years old, we'll concentrate on Preoperational stage and beyond.

#### PREOPERATIONAL STAGE (2-7)

Parents often yell in despair at their children, "You think the world revolves around you, don't you?" For a child in the preoperational stage, this is figuratively true, at least in their eyes. Children in this stage are egocentric, which doesn't mean that they're necessarily selfish (although they can be) but merely that they cannot comprehend the world from another person's perspective. To a child at this stage, the entire world thinks like he does. Why wouldn't it?

This does not mean, however, that the preoperational child isn't interested in things other than

himself. Rather, children at this stage are often alarmingly curious to the point of self-endangerment. But a child sees these things from his point of view only. If he sees something new, his first reaction is to make up an explanation for it, rather than seek out someone else who might understand it. Even things that would scare an adult with their sheer wrongness, such as monsters or the Messengers, don't faze a child of, say, age five because he's barely had time to codify what is right in the first place. Furthermore, a child at this stage does not yet understand the relationships between similar objects or passages, even in situations that seem obvious to an adult. If a five-year-old child is told it takes 15 minutes to reach his hunter group's bunker, he doesn't realize that it also takes 15 minutes to get back.

Children at this stage also often have difficulty with complex symbols and figures. They tend to concentrate on certain features to the exclusion of others. For example, if a young child attempts to draw a square, she often ends up drawing a circle. Concentrating on drawing an enclosed object, he forgets about angles. Curiously enough, imbued children this age do not seem to have such problems when making hunter code markings. Equally curious is the fact that an imbued child who might confuse a circle with an oval has no trouble distinguishing between the hunter code emblems for "imbued" and "protected," despite the signs' similarity to each other.

Other difficulties during this stage include understanding of numbers, distance and time. A child may see an approaching car up the road but still begin crossing because he doesn't yet comprehend that the car will not always be at its current location. Similarly, a child doesn't yet have an understanding of mathematical conservation: He can watch a parent cut a sausage into pieces yet be convinced he now has more on his plate, because the food seems to take up more space.

**Roleplaying Tips:** When playing a child at this stage, keep your curiosity in high gear. While children may be shy, outgoing, reserved or extroverted, all display strong interest in their surroundings. Watch a child who clings to his mother's skirt. Unless he is approached, his gaze shifts about constantly. You may also be very confident. Not only do children see things in a very egocentric manner, they understand rules in a very egocentric fashion. You do what you do because it's good to do it, and everyone else should do what you do because it's good to do it, too!

With regard to the hunt, extreme violence is often one more thing for your character to be curious

about. The connections between action and reaction, between act and consequence, are not yet made in your mind. An imbued first-grader's initial success in using Cleave against a monster might lead the child to try re-creating the effect on a bullying classmate. And unless another hunter (A teacher? A sitter? A relative?) instructs you about the importance of secrecy, you're likely to be considered... *imaginative*, at the very least. But most preoperational children are viewed as having a problem with the truth — separating it from lies, their own and those of others; distinguishing between memories and dreams; and so on. If you're lucky, most people think your elaborate tales about "running from the dead people" refer to some childish game.

#### CONCRETE OPERATIONAL STAGE (8-11)

In many respects, the so-called "dream world" in which children are supposed to live involves a lack of understanding of symbols. For example, while a young child might be able to recite numbers, she doesn't yet understand that numbers are merely symbols for groupings or orderings of objects. The concrete operational stage child is beginning to grasp the symbols that shape our understanding of the world, and is moving toward an adult comprehension of reality.

Children at this age begin to develop the ability to internalize their actions. For example, although a preoperational child might be able to memorize the path from his house to the cinemaplex (or the monster's hideout), he would never be able to describe it later. He needs to be there, using the physical evidence of the path to find his way. The older child, in contrast, can think through the path in his head or draw a map of how to get there. That said, the younger child remains bound to the thinking of still solid, real situations. More abstract thinking eludes the concrete operational child, such as discussing ways to get to the movie theater faster.

A more balanced understanding of objects and numbers also emerges in this stage. If you cut up a sausage on the concrete operational child's plate, she recognizes that it's still just one sausage. Likewise, she is able to categorize objects, and even sort them according to physical characteristics. ("These monsters had the most rotting flesh, and these ones had a little less, but those ones we saw in the woods didn't have any at all.")

Perhaps the main difference in the way this child thinks, as opposed to adults, is a certain rigidity in thinking. Although a child at this stage can note that flames seem to work really well against rots and even consider why, she doesn't begin to ponder what other tricks would work well based on that knowledge.

Morally, her attitude is similar. Although she no longer operates on a completely id-driven, egocentric moral code and follows rules set by others (such as adults), she does not begin to consider why those rules are set or to judge whether they are fair. Among children, more Judges are imbued at this stage of development than at any other.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Children at this stage remain just as egocentric as any younger child, so show it in your actions and motives. You may well understand that a friend is sad and you try to help him, but it doesn't occur to you to consider why he's sad. You slowly develop an understanding of duties, responsibilities and teamwork, but you've yet to consider the reasons for their existence. When in doubt, take things utterly literally.

A child's response to the imbuing at this age can be almost surreal. The Messengers' fondness for cryptic slogans can clash with a child's over-literal take on them to produce unusual results. Moral shadings can produce extreme emotional dissonance at this stage. You may see monsters as inherently "bad," so one hunter's persecuting another (or *you*) for some less-than-respectful-of-public-safety method of stopping a creature could provoke in you anything from confused aggression to a temporary derangement.

#### FORMAL OPERATIONAL STAGE (12-16)

By this stage, a child's thinking is structurally little different than that of an adult. The ability to rationally weigh physical evidence is extended to judging thoughts and other reasoning. A child at this age can argue someone's logic rather than their evidence. Time and space become fully meaningful concepts. Morality becomes more similar to an adult's, rules exist for a purpose and they can be broken in certain circumstances.

None of which is to say that the child is suddenly on par with any adult. Children at this stage still learn new things every day, and they are still short on life experience. The systems by which a teen processes new information are now fixed for the rest of his life, however.

Children at this age develop the ability to picture the world through another person's eyes. As a result, children who were imbued at younger ages often gain a profound sadness as they finally begin to see what they've missed in pursuing the hunt. Depression is a strong and active enemy in this situation.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Resist the urge to become a "little adult" at this stage. You're an adult intellectually, but you're still as vulnerable as any child emotionally — confused by those older than you, trying to make the logical leaps to fill the holes in your knowledge, and now coming to grips with developing

sexuality — especially early in the age band. You're entering adolescence, with all its confusion, idealism and constant change. Whereas on the intellectual front, the concrete operational stage is a child's transitional period, this stage is the social transition. Adults begin to burden you with adult responsibilities yet continue to grant you the respect of a child — limited — which is always an infuriating situation.

The fact that imbuiings began relatively recently means that no one has had a chance to grow up *with* the hunt — whose numerous dangers mean that few youthful hunters survive to grow up. If you are one of those exceptions, keep in mind that *normal* teens contend daily with feelings of envy, inadequacy, inexplicable desire and exaggerated agony. You deal with all that *and* a brutal secret life. What keeps you doing it? What sort of future do you hope for? What's your family like, and do they *know*? If so, how do they help and hinder you? (As normal people close to an imbued person, they're likely to do both.) And if you haven't run away from home yet, *what's stopping you?*

Respond to the new responsibilities you experience with a childlike attitude and you nail it.

#### CHARACTER CREATION

The only thing that should be different with your child-character's creation as opposed to an adult's is where the dots go. Remember, children are as complex as any adult — perhaps even more so. Go over your origins and history as strongly as with any other character. If anything, be *more* focused on your origins than you would be with an adult. After all, you have to pack as many interesting hooks as you can into your character with a far shorter history.

Also, remember who the main foci of a child's life are. In the vast majority of cases, a child's parents are the most important foci of her life. How does she feel toward them? The relationship does not have to be a simplistic or idyllic one; children can dislike their parents strongly for reasons trivial ("My mom makes me do lots of chores") or traumatic ("My dad is always getting drunk and hitting me"). Yet, very few children don't love their parents. Consider the position of children: small, vulnerable and often confused by a world designed for people bigger than they are. To whom can they turn for protection? Other than their parents, there are few answers. Do not neglect, however, to cover close friends, enemies, extended family, siblings, teachers and the many other people your character has to deal with on a regular basis. Like any hunter, children do not exist in a vacuum. Show how they relate to the world and how it relates to them.

Children between the ages of seven and 12 should take the "Child" and "Short" flaw at character cre-

ation, and most children under 14 should also have both, although some pre-teens are as tall as any adult.

Children under six are tricky cases. The Storyteller system doesn't allow very well for characters who are so profoundly below the adult average in many ways. Even an adult with 1 Strength is more powerful than are most children that young. They are likely to know far, far less than most characters. The differences are so vast that no Flaw could accurately describe the gap. Hence, no Flaw exists for children so young, although they should still take the "Child" Flaw, as normal. In addition, simply accept the fact that your character is not as strong as those around him.

Young children begin with a 4/4/3 split of Attributes. Physical must be tertiary, and you do not begin with an automatic point in either Strength or Dexterity. If you have zero in either Attribute, you are simply the proverbial victim of confectionery thievery and you may not attempt any rolls with that Attribute.

Abilities are even more cramped. A young child may be weak and may not think as quickly or as comprehensively as an adult, but at least the natural resources are there. A child who isn't a prodigy hasn't even had a hope of learning anything at a functional level, however. The most they can hope for is a few simple tricks learned from parents or teachers. Thus, children begin with only 5 points in Talents, 2 in Skills and a piddling 1 point in Knowledges.

The Storyteller may also allow you to select 1 Skill and two Knowledges as being "familiar" to the character. This optional rule doesn't purvey any mechanical benefits, but it shows a certain understanding of a subject. A child may not have any points in Computer, but he does know how to turn one on and boot up a game. Storytellers should note this allowance in their games.

Other areas are also limited. Children this young have a mere 2 Background points, although the Storyteller may allow a few points "by proxy," such as having

a high Resources and rich parents. The money affects your life, but you can't access it. Treat such Background points as character flavor, with no game effects, similar to "familiar" Abilities.

Otherwise, you begin with standard Conviction, Edges and Virtues, but only 1 Willpower point.

Finally, the Storyteller should account for your character growing and developing. No systems are given here, but as the years progress in-game (if they do), the Storyteller should award a few Attribute points and occasionally an Ability point to represent your character's growth. Consider any Attribute points not received at character creation to be held "in reserve" and given to you at a later date. The same also goes for outstanding Ability and Willpower points.

### RESOLVING A CHILD WITHIN A HUNTER GROUP

It's obvious that a very young child hunter is not going to be even a useful backup member in the field, and even an "older" child is still small, weak and less socially accepted than an adult hunter. So why would adult hunters bother with young brethren?

Because despite the limitations of youth, the fact remains that children are still *imbued*. That's significant when you consider how rare the chosen are. No hunter is in a position to pick and choose his companions. An extra set of hands is an extra set of hands, even if they're small. Those hands can still do computer research with the right instruction. Edges such as Insinuate can still work over a telephone, and a child can use them as effectively as anyone else can. With such advantages, a youngster can handle liaisons with (or espionage against) monsters for her friends. In short, children might not leap straight into the fray, but there's no reason why they can't serve as excellent home-front soldiers. The fact that the Messengers have selected a child means that it's probably worth spending the time to teach him or her to be helpful.

After all, when the Messengers do choose a child, they must imbue her for a reason, right?